

A romantic couple is featured in the upper half of the image. The woman, with long brown hair, is wearing a black top with a fur collar and looking slightly away from the camera. The man, with dark hair, is wearing a white shirt with a lace collar and is embracing her. The background is a bright blue sky with white clouds. The lower half of the image shows a misty, golden-hued landscape with rolling hills and evergreen trees.

AMERICAN WILDERNESS  
SERIES ROMANCE

BOOK 6

THE  
BEAUTY OF Love

*From a Readers' Favorite Gold Medal winner...*

DOROTHY  
WILEY

THE BEAUTY  
OF LOVE

*Dedication*

*To my Father  
James A. MacMillan  
who taught me the beauty  
of a father's love.  
We miss you!*

THE BEAUTY  
OF LOVE

BOOK SIX

AMERICAN WILDERNESS  
SERIES ROMANCE

DOROTHY WILEY

# THE BEAUTY OF LOVE

## DOROTHY WILEY

*Copyright © 2016 by Dorothy Wiley*

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced, scanned, or distributed in any form, printed or electronic, without permission. Please do not participate in or encourage piracy of copyrighted materials, in violation of the author's rights.

To obtain permission to excerpt portions of the text, please contact the author via her website [www.dorothywiley.com](http://www.dorothywiley.com)

ISBN-13: 978-1523966158

ISBN-10: 1523966157

*Cover design by Erin Dameron-Hill*

The Beauty of Love is a fictional novel inspired by history, rather than a precise account of history. Except for historically prominent personages, the characters are fictional and names, places, and incidents either are the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, businesses, companies, events, or locales is entirely coincidental. Each book in the series can be read independently.

For the sake of understanding, the author used language for her characters for the modern reader rather than strictly reflecting the far more formal speech and writing patterns of colonial America.

*Other Titles by Dorothy Wiley*

WILDERNESS TRAIL OF LOVE

NEW FRONTIER OF LOVE

WHISPERING HILLS OF LOVE

FRONTIER HIGHLANDER VOW OF LOVE

FRONTIER GIFT OF LOVE

# PRAISE FOR AUTHOR DOROTHY WILEY

*“Skillful, entertaining and sparkly.”*

–HISTORICAL NOVEL SOCIETY INDIE REVIEW

*“An exciting historical romance that captivates and amazes. Heart-pounding conflict from the start...”*

–READERS’ CHOICE FIVE-STAR AWARD REVIEW

*“A stunning novel with beautiful descriptions and captivating characters. Wiley’s novel is, as all of her others, a story to savor.”*

–AWARD-WINNING AUTHOR DEBORAH GAFFORD

*“This is a wonderful book, not only for its historical value, but also for its lessons regarding life, love, and honor.”*

–MELINDA HILLS, READERS’ FAVORITE 5-STAR REVIEW

*“Wiley’s books have all received a 5-star rating from me! All I could do was sigh at the end. I look forward to reading many more books in the series.”*

–JOANNE FOR ROMANCING THE BOOK

*“Give it ten stars! Couldn’t wait for Bear’s story. Great read. Hope there are more books about these wonderful people!!!!”*

–AMAZON READER

*“Ms. Wiley’s writing skills are powerful and compelling and her books are not to be missed.”*

–TIMELESS ROMANTIC REVIEW

*“Dorothy Wiley's series just gets better with each book. I was born and raised in Kentucky. To read about my home and the brave women and men who started this great state makes me hold my head a little higher. Thank you Ms. Wiley for representing Kentucky and our history with such passion and love! I look forward to many more books in this series.”*

–DONNET CORNETT, AMAZON REVIEWER

*“A must read. One of the best books I've ever read. A must read!”*

–GOODREADS REVIEWER

*“This is the best book I have read in a long time...just beautiful.”*

–GOODREADS REVIEWER

*“This romantic adventure takes the reader on a thrilling journey...the light and easy style of writing complements an engaging storyline.”*

–HISTORICAL NOVEL SOCIETY EDITOR'S CHOICE



### *She Walks in Beauty*

*She walks in beauty, like the night  
Of cloudless climes and starry skies;  
And all that's best of dark and bright  
Meet in her aspect and her eyes;  
Thus mellowed to that tender light  
Which heaven to gaudy day denies.*

*One shade the more, one ray the less,  
Had half impaired the nameless grace  
Which waves in every raven tress,  
Or softly lightens o'er her face;  
Where thoughts serenely sweet express  
How pure, how dear their dwelling-place.*

*And on that cheek, and o'er that brow,  
So soft, so calm, yet eloquent,  
The smiles that win, the tints that glow,  
But tell of days in goodness spent,  
A mind at peace with all below,*

*A heart whose love is innocent!*  
*Lord Byron*

# CONTENTS

PROLOGUE

CHAPTER 1

CHAPTER 2

CHAPTER 3

CHAPTER 4

CHAPTER 5

CHAPTER 6

CHAPTER 7

CHAPTER 8

CHAPTER 9

CHAPTER 10

CHAPTER 11

CHAPTER 12

CHAPTER 13

CHAPTER 14

CHAPTER 15

CHAPTER 16

CHAPTER 17

CHAPTER 18

CHAPTER 19

CHAPTER 20

CHAPTER 21

CHAPTER 22

CHAPTER 23

CHAPTER 24

CHAPTER 25

CHAPTER 26

CHAPTER 27

CHAPTER 28

CHAPTER 29

CHAPTER 30

CHAPTER 31

CHAPTER 32

CHAPTER 33

CHAPTER 34

CHAPTER 35

CHAPTER 36

CHAPTER 37

CHAPTER 38

CHAPTER 39

CHAPTER 40

EPILOGUE

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

## PROLOGUE

*Barrington, New Hampshire*

*Late Spring, 1800*

Edward Wyllie stared at his wife's roses—like her they were lovely, but not alive. Over the years, he often brought Anne a rose, plucked from a bush here and there. Always red. She normally put the blossom in a crystal bud vase on her dressing table, but every so often, she stuck it in her hair. Now, the symbol of his unfailing love, carved in granite, rested forever with her.

He ran the tip of his finger softly over the petals. They were hard and cold. Much like his life. Despite his wealth and the success he worked so hard to achieve, now he had nothing that mattered.

Even though he tried so hard to protect them, he'd failed.

Joshua, the town's headstone carver, succeeded in skillfully depicting exactly what Edward ordered. A partially opened rose symbolized that she perished as a young woman and its thorny stem was snapped because she died too soon. Much, much too soon.

"Your death ripped out my heart," he whispered to her. "And the deaths of our little ones shred it to pieces."

Even though a year had passed, he still could not bear to look at the headstones of his three children and he kept them to his back. He'd ceased to live when they died and he was certain he would never truly feel alive again. He stood in silence remembering his precious lambs, as he stared into the woods that surrounded Nottingham Cemetery. Budding spring life filled the ancient forest. The hardwoods and pines were sweetened with flowering dogwoods and spiced with flowering shrubs.

He imagined his children joyfully running among the trees, hiding from one another. The sight in his mind's eye was far better

than seeing their headstones, lined up on his wife's right side—just as their bodies were the day he retrieved them from Anne's parent's house at Bow Lake Village. Sleeping shrouded angels.

Someday soon, he would find the courage to face them. To accept the guilt and beg forgiveness.

He turned his head and glanced across the graveyard when he heard a sound. A woman strolled up the footpath toward a hardened mound of earth partially covered in new spring grass and weeds.

She carried a bouquet of pink roses in her hand, pointed toward the ground, the soft petals brushing up against her skirt as she strolled. Was she just preoccupied or did the careless handling of the bouquet signify anything? Perhaps, since she wore a black gown, she was grief-stricken.

He couldn't see her down-turned face, hidden by her bonnet. For some reason, he wondered if it would be beautiful like Anne's was. Even from where he stood he could sense loneliness emanating from her. Perhaps it was the way she walked or the way she hung her head.

People in graveyards often experienced a feeling of lonesomeness. They were there, after all, because they had lost someone. But this was the first time he seemed to share that feeling with another.

She knelt gracefully beside the grave and laid the bouquet down.

Then he heard the report of a rifle.

The grave's mound exploded in front of her

.

## CHAPTER 1

Edward dashed toward the woman in black, yanking out his pistol as he ran. He searched the timber for any sign of smoke from the rifle's powder. He saw none. The cowardly shooter must be hidden somewhere in the canopy of thick trees.

The woman just stood there. She should be running away. "Run!" he yelled. "Hide behind that oak."

She turned toward him, but didn't move. When he was still several long strides away he could see that she *was* beautiful, just as he'd known she would be.

"There's no need," she said, calmly. "They're just trying to scare me."

Edward's heart beat wildly in his chest. Was it from danger or the presence of this strange woman? "Madame, I assure you, a rifle shot is indeed something to fear. Come with me!" He reached for her arm and hauled her behind the large nearby oak.

As soon as he released her, she began brushing off the dirt that had settled on her satin gown. "Sir, I appreciate your concern, but I assure you, there is no real danger. Except perhaps to my appearance." She removed a handkerchief from her reticule and wiped her face and hands.

What the dickens was she thinking? "So someone is shooting at you with no intention of harming you?" he asked. "Surely you are mistaken. That shot came intolerably close."

"There's no mistake," she insisted.

He peered around the graveyard, searching for the shooter as he persisted, "I'm not so certain, Madame. For your safety, I insist we get you out of here. You can come with me. My carriage is at the graveyard gate. We can go to my home or somewhere else if you prefer. We need to discuss this further." He was certain the woman

was not thinking clearly, perhaps because of her grief. People did not shoot at you for no reason. She needed his help.

She looked him over, seeming to appraise him in the process.

“My home is located a short distance away in one of the finest parts of Barrington. I assure you, Madame, I am a respectable gentleman of honor,” he told her.

“I can see that. Not just by your fine attire, but in your conduct, Sir. However, there is nothing to discuss. Although, I would be pleased to visit your home to rest for a bit. I am rather parched and weary from my walk from town.”

Keeping his pistol at the ready and pointed toward the spot where the sound of the rifle had come from, they strode swiftly toward the gate. He helped her into his small carriage and hurried to the other side. Since there had been only the one shot, perhaps she was right and there was no further danger. But he thought it prudent to get them both away from this isolated location as swiftly as possible.

He quickly tucked his pistol into his belt and took a seat beside her.

She glanced at him and smiled demurely. “This is kind of you, Sir.”

Her smile was enough to cause a quickening of his pulse. He didn’t take the time to respond and gave the reins a snap to hurry the horse along. As they took off, he reminded himself to not react to her beyond the bounds of a gentleman and recent widower. He no longer desired the company of a woman, no matter how beautiful she was.

“I’m Edward Wyllie,” he said, extending his outstretched hand.

She shook it with her gloved hand. “I’m Dora Williams, and I’m pleased to make your acquaintance, Sir,” she said. Her voice was strong and confident.

Holding her gaze, he noticed her extraordinary eyes for the first time. They were hazel and contained hues of green, amber and even specks of blue. Their sparkle reflected light back at him. Her smooth skin, with gold undertones, glowed against her rich auburn hair. The shimmering strands that fell from beneath her bonnet reached well past her bosom. He released her hand from his and asked, “Why were

you shot at?”

“That was my late husband’s grave,” she answered.

“I’m sorry for your loss,” he said, realizing she did not answer his question.

“What were you doing here at the cemetery?” she asked.

“Visiting my family,” he managed to say.

“My husband succumbed to winter fever last November.”

“My sincere condolences, Mrs. Williams.”

“You said your surname name was Wyllie. Does your family own Wyllie Mountain?” she asked.

“Actually, my oldest brother Sam owns it,” he answered. “It was the site of our family home until an enormous mudslide took it and our parents and sister with it. My brothers and I were all away hunting at the time.”

“Wyllie Mountain is next to my late husband’s land. He owned Mount Webster.”

“From Wyllie Mountain, Mount Webster is just on the other side of Crawford Notch Road. Have you been there?”

Her face grew sad. “No. I’ve only heard my late husband’s descriptions. He intended to take me on a tour of the area this summer. Now, I will have to go by myself.”

“We’ll be at my home shortly,” he said. He decided not to ask her any more questions until she’d had a chance to refresh herself. Despite her outward appearance of bravery, he suspected the episode at the cemetery must have been trying for her.

As he drove the carriage through Barrington, he marveled at the town’s recent growth. Slow at first to be settled because of its rocky soil, Barrington, was now home to three thousand souls. Nearly all were his customers who bought everything from shoe buckles to cinnamon from him. Most of them were employed by the town’s primary industry, the smelting of iron ore taken from nearby mountains. In recent years, industry in Barrington surged beyond everyone’s expectations.



They soon drove past the finest homes in Barrington, most built by the city's other wealthy merchants. His mind for business allowed him to capitalize on the area's growth and his lucrative store was now one of the region's largest establishments. It was so successful, in fact, he opened a second and then third store in nearby towns. He had used his profits to build a substantial home, furnished with the best of luxuries. But now, with only a footman, cook, and maid to share it with, it all meant nothing.

He had no one to live for.

His home was no longer a happy place. In fact, it always seemed to be brooding and lonely. Like him. Even though he'd managed to wrench his life from the quicksand of grief, he still seemed to be plodding through a swamp of loneliness and gloom. Lately, he often dreamt of being lost in a marshy bog, searching endlessly for a way out.

As he pulled his carriage up through his drive, he wondered if she was searching for a way out too.



Because she was a woman of good breeding, Dora struggled not to gape when she set eyes on Wyllie's home. From Boston's upper sort herself, she was accustomed to fine homes, including the one where she grew up. But this was a place of stunning beauty, it gave the appearance of a fine jewel in the upper-class neighborhood. Windows and touches of brass ornamentation sparkled in the afternoon sunlight. Broadleaf trees of uncommon beauty, fitting guardians of such a splendid home, shaded an enormous front lawn.

Wyllie drove the carriage up the gravel driveway to the front of the house and a footman appeared, hurried down the steps, and helped her out of the carriage.

"Thank you, Luke," Wyllie told the tall thin young man of about twenty years of age who then rushed up to open the door.

Dora gathered her skirt in her hands and lifted it slightly as she made her way up the brick steps. Wyllie followed as she stepped inside. The house was silent, eerily so. Not even the tick of a clock broke the stillness.

"Please have a seat in the parlor," he said, gesturing toward it.

"I'll just go ask my cook to prepare some tea. Or would you prefer coffee?"

"Tea, please. With cream and sugar," she told him. While he was gone, she took notice of the fine rugs, furniture, and decorative pieces in the home. The room was tastefully decorated, elegant without opulence, in pale shades of blue and gold.

He returned and took a seat across from her in a large wing-back upholstered chair, with an intricately sewn needlework cushion to the back.

She wondered if his wife had stitched the pillow. "Do you have children, Mr. Wyllie?"

"No, I do not."

"I see. Are you recently married then?" she asked.

"No, I am not." When she started to ask another question, he interrupted. "Mrs. Williams, if I may. I would like to help you find whoever is trying to frighten you. I am well connected in this city and elsewhere and I may be able to help."

"I do not need to find them, Sir. I know who they are."

"Why haven't you put a stop to it then?"

"I can't prove they're doing it. But I know it's them."

"Who? Who is doing this do you? What else have they done?"

"Although we lived quite comfortably because of his father's wealth, my husband was not yet a wealthy man himself. However, he did recently inherit a great deal of land about a half-day's ride north of here—including Mount Webster. The land contains rich deposits of iron and other minerals. My husband intended to begin mining operations, but unfortunately grew ill before he could do so."

Wyllie remained quiet, his fingers steepled, waiting for her to continue.

"By family legend, passed down from my husband's maternal ancestors, the mountain also contains a hidden treasure."

Wyllie chuckled. "What kind of treasure?"

“Gold coins hidden somewhere in the mountain by early explorers—perhaps Vikings or early Europeans. I have no idea. That’s all there is to the legend and all I know. But certain members of his family—especially his uncles—are convinced that my husband must have told me where the gold is hidden before he passed.”

A middle-aged woman carrying a silver tray came in, smiled kindly at her, and then bent over to place the tray on a tea table in front of her. The woman smelled of vanilla and cinnamon.

“Here you go, some nice hot tea to refresh you.”

“Mrs. Williams, this is my cook, Mrs. Hollingsworth.”

“Thank you, Mrs. Hollingsworth,” she told the woman.

“You are most welcome. Enjoy your visit.” The cook quickly left the room leaving the door open behind her.

“So, it is your uncles who are trying to scare you?”

“My late husband’s uncles, not mine,” she said adamantly, as he poured tea for both of them. “His father’s brothers.”

“Where do they live?” Edward asked, as he handed her a cup.

“In Boston, where I live. I believe they followed me here to Barrington and then to Nottingham Cemetery.”

“Good heavens. Do you suppose the two followed us here as well?”

“Yes, indeed I do. But, as I said at the cemetery, they are of no real threat. They’re harmless old fools.”

Edward sat his cup down and peered out the room’s heavy drapes. “Harmless fools can quickly change to dangerous enemies when gold is at stake.”

“Perhaps you’re right. But I know these two. They told me they would keep making my life miserable until I tell them where the treasure is hidden. No matter how many times they threaten me or try to scare me, I will *not* be cowed by them. They won’t kill me as long as they think I have something to tell them. And I don’t.”

“And when they finally realize their tactics aren’t working and you won’t say anything, what do you think they will do?” he asked.

“I confess I have never pondered that,” she said, embarrassed that she’d never thought about it.

“Why is your late husband buried in Barrington if his family is from Boston? I grew up near here and never knew of any families by the name of Williams.”

“His father was from Boston, but his mother was from Barrington—Elizabeth Webster. My husband was fond of his mother and wanted to be buried by her side. He despised his father, and his uncles. I honored his last wishes and had his body brought here for a quiet burial the day he died.”

“I remember a Webster family. But they moved away years ago when I was young.”

“Yes, they relocated to Boston where she met her husband. But she always considered Barrington her home and desired to be buried here alongside her ancestors. My husband complied with her last wishes. She’s the one who left him Mount Webster and the surrounding area. The land has been in her family for generations.” She took a sip of her tea. “Listen to me prattle on and on. I should be leaving, not boring you with my problem.” She stood to leave and he rose as well.

“I hate to be so forward, but please don’t leave. It’s been ages since I’ve had the pleasure of anyone’s company in my home. And it would be my honor to assist you if I may.”

She gazed into his eyes and perceived loneliness there. Reluctantly, she sat down again. She should be leaving, not sharing details of her life with a complete stranger, even if she was inexplicably drawn to him. For some reason, being with him felt right. She sensed a kindred soul in this man. And, of late, she’d grown exceedingly tired of being alone as well. Besides, she had nothing better to do. The coach back to Boston didn’t leave until tomorrow afternoon.

Wyllie remained standing and began to pace. “So you were just visiting your late husband’s grave earlier?” he asked, bringing her back to her story.

“Yes, today is his birthday, so I wanted to bring him flowers. It’s the first time I’ve been back since the day I buried him seven months ago.”

“I’m afraid your bouquet got blown to pieces.”

“Yes, I’m sure the petals have scattered in the wind.”

“You’re staying in town then?”

“That’s right, at the Hartwell Inn. But I’m returning to Boston tomorrow afternoon by coach.”

“If you can wait a day or two longer, I would be happy to escort you there. I will be traveling to Boston soon to meet my brother and his wife. I’ll hire a private coach.”

“Your offer is most kind, but I hardly know you Mr. Wyllie.”

Although, in that moment, she desperately wanted to know him.

She studied his dark intriguing eyes, specked with flecks of gold. They gazed back at her with nothing but gentleness and held no hint of guile or deceit.

His voice was deep, but kind and cultured.

His face, framed by clean close-cropped dark hair, was handsome and his features strong.

But his eyes, his voice, and his face all bore a touch of sadness that made her heart want to reach out to him.

## CHAPTER 2

*Boston, Massachusetts, late May, 1800*

Captain Sam Wyllie's jaw clenched tighter and tighter the closer they got to Boston. The long trip from their home in Kentucky took him, Catherine and their infant son more than a month to complete.

Their nine-year-old adopted son, Little John, wanted to stay in Kentucky with his Uncle Bear and Bear's wife Artis. At first, Sam was reluctant to leave his son behind, but Little John and Bear were very close and Sam knew his son would benefit from an extended stay with the couple. Little John would also be able to keep his new puppy with him. Bear promised to teach Little John everything he knew about tracking animals and Artis promised to share her considerable horse training and racing skills with the boy, all of which would be valuable around Sam's horse farm.

In mid-April, to see them off on their journey, Bear and Little John accompanied them to Louisville, where they had booked passage on a keelboat for river transport up the Ohio. They boarded the keelboat from the settlement of Maysville, just north of Louisville, on the banks of the Ohio River. At that point, the river was a mile wide.

Sam had rented half of the divided shelter at the center of the long narrow cigar-shaped riverboat, where Catherine and the babe could travel comfortably and have some privacy. The boat's Captain, the legendary Mike Fink, took the other half.

That first leg of their journey proved to be quite exciting. An attack by natives from the northern riverbank and occasional attempts by river pirates operating out of caves caused Fink to appreciate Sam's keen eye and skill with his Kentucky rifle.

Fink was a formidable character himself. Men described him as half stallion and half alligator. The boatman wore a red feather in his cap and claimed to have defeated every strong man up and down the river. On every possible occasion, he boasted he could, "out-run, out-

hop, out-jump, throw-down, drag out, and lick any man in the country.”

Sam almost wished he had brought Bear along to see a match between the two. If he was a betting man, which he wasn't, he would have put his money on Bear.

But for the most part, Sam and Catherine both enjoyed their journey on the beautiful Ohio River. Its Iroquoian name, meaning Good River, seemed fitting. Its current flowed gently and its waters, unbroken by rocks and rapids, were smooth and clear.

They took the keelboat all the way to Redstone, Pennsylvania. From there they hired a private coach to take them on to Boston, roughly six-hundred miles and twelve days travel time. Except for a family of pigs taking a bath in the roadway, and later a fallen tree, travel along the road had been uneventful, although long, arduous, and bone-jarring. At times the roads were so hard and rutted they threatened to shake their coach to pieces and at other times they were so muddy they could only creep along. At least they were spared the clouds of choking dust and hordes of mosquitos that would plague travelers later in the heat of summer.

Sam wasn't sure which was worse, the rocking keelboat, which made his stomach lurch, or the bouncy coach, which made him feel every joint in his body. He definitely preferred the back of a horse to either modes of transportation. If it weren't for Rory, he might have tried to persuade Catherine to make the journey horseback. But the infant needed the protection from the elements that the keelboat and carriage provided and taking the river route cut months off their journey. At least the rocking coach quickly lulled their now five-month old son to sleep and kept him from crying for the most part.

Now, at long last, their carriage driver wove them through the busy streets of Boston toward Catherine's childhood home. Sam glanced from the window to his wife and child. His sense of foreboding intensified the closer they drew to her parents.

Catherine smiled. “Don't worry Sam, you'll find the words to say,” she said.

“I'm only worried for you. I have no idea what kind of reception you will receive from your parents.”

She glanced down at their son. “Bringing along this handsome boy should soften their feelings toward me, and hopefully you as

well.”

They both gazed lovingly at Rory—their miracle babe—born on Christmas Day after a difficult birth. Sam nearly lost both of them and the thought still made his heart clench. He would do anything to keep his family safe and happy, including journeying here to confront Catherine’s wealthy father, Remington Forbes.

Last winter, the Boston businessman sent three men to force Sam to sell Wyllie Mountain in his home state of New Hampshire. Sam believed Forbes must want the mountain for its gold. If he had signed the deed, the men were authorized to kill Sam so that Catherine would have no reason to stay in Kentucky. Forbes wanted his only daughter back in Boston. That much was clear. But the reason why he would take such desperate measures to ensure her return was not clear.

Sam suspected it was to get his greedy hands on her wealth, a substantial fortune that she inherited from her maternal grandfather.

“We’re almost there,” Catherine said. The journey took its toll on her, but she appeared refreshed and perfectly groomed after their stay at a nearby inn the previous night. Her black hair gleamed and she’d worn one of her finer gowns made of dark blue satin. Sam still wore his buckskins although he’d made an effort to scrub them clean after he’d bathed and shaved the night before.

“Do you feel like you’re coming home?” he asked.

She raised her chin a bit. “My home is in Kentucky—with you and our sons.”

The carriage began to slow as it neared the Forbes estate. Sam peered out the window again. What he saw shocked him. He knew Catherine’s father was wealthy, but never anticipated this. The grand Federal-style house on the edge of Boston stood three-stories tall. The architectural details were more ornate than any they had passed in the fashionable neighborhood. A large expanse of land, most of which was carefully manicured, surrounded the house. As the carriage approached, it followed a tree-lined road through the front meadow and over a stone bridge. Minutes later, the driver drove the carriage under a porte-cochere, a large covered drive, on the right side of the enormous mansion, and tugged the horse team to a stop.

Sam disembarked and then helped Catherine and the baby out of the carriage.



A servant, with graying hair at his temples, immediately popped out to help with their luggage.

“Hello Lucius,” Catherine told the man. “So good to see you again.”

“It is a joy to have you back, Miss Catherine,” he told her.

“It’s Mrs. Wyllie now,” she corrected.

“Yes, Mrs. Wyllie,” Lucius said. “I heard about Mr. Adams’ unfortunate death. I see you’ve been blessed with a little one. Boy or girl?”

“Boy,” Sam answered.

“His name is Rory,” Catherine added, smiling down at their cooing son. “And this is my husband, Captain Sam Wyllie.”

“An honor to meet you, Captain.”

While Catherine gave Lucius instructions, Sam spoke to the carriage driver and settled his account with the man. They’d given him half the fare when they left Pennsylvania. Sam counted out the coins for the remaining half and added a sizeable bonus. Throughout their journey, the driver had made a concerted effort to be helpful and volunteered to remain in Boston until Sam was ready to return, saying his horses had earned a good rest.

“Follow me Sam,” Catherine told him. “Lucius will put our luggage in my former room.”

“No,” Sam said. “Lucius, please just leave it piled here for the time being. I’ve asked the carriage driver to wait before departing until I tell him to leave. We may want to stay at an inn.”

Catherine appeared puzzled, but then readily agreed. “Perhaps that would be wise. Have my parents been told of our arrival?” Catherine asked Lucius.

“Yes, Madame. I sent one of the maids to inform both of them. Shall I take you to the parlor?”

“Yes, thank you Lucius,” she told him.

As they made their way toward the parlor, the opulent home filled with lavish furnishings, Sam realized just how affluent and

comfortable his wife's childhood must have been. It made him appreciate, even more than he did before, that her journey with her first husband toward Kentucky must have been a tremendous shock to her. When Adams was killed, she was left alone on the Wilderness Trail until Sam and the rest of his family encountered her driving her wagon team. Afraid her father would force her to marry for wealth and position again if she returned to Boston, she decided to continue on to Kentucky with them.

"What do they do with all these rooms?" he asked.

"They entertain constantly, mostly to further my father's businesses or to garner the favor of politicians. The third floor is entirely devoted to a large ballroom."

"It must take an army of servants to maintain this and the grounds," he said.

"Indeed," she agreed.

Lucius opened the door to the parlor and Sam and Catherine entered. "I'll have a maid bring you refreshments," he offered. "And I can ask one of them to take care of the babe if you like."

"Thank you Lucius," Catherine said. "Refreshments would be nice, but we'll keep Rory with us." When Lucius left, she sat their son down on a plush oval rug and reached into the bag that Sam had carried in that contained baby cloths and other necessities. She handed Rory his toy horse and a rattle and then checked his cloth. "Still clean and dry, thank goodness."

Relieved that they were alone again, Sam leaned his long rifle up against a table, drew Catherine up to him, and hugged her. "This will all turn out for the best," he told her, "one way or the other."

"I know. I'm no longer afraid of him—now that I have you by my side."

"And that's where I intend to stay," he said. He gave her a gentle kiss and turned at the sound of the parlor door opening.

A slender attractive woman in her mid-sixties entered the room. Dressed in a lavish gray day gown and bedecked in sparkling jewels, she didn't just walk in, she made an entrance. She radiated the appearance of a woman who was cultivated, elegant, and dignified. Yet, at once, she raised his apprehensions even further.

“Mother,” Catherine said.

Sam had expected Catherine to greet her mother excitedly, but his wife appeared almost cool toward her mother.

Mrs. Forbes gave Sam an imperious glance from her glacial eyes before walking over to Catherine and placing her hand on his wife’s arm. “My darling girl. At last you have arrived. From your letter, we were expecting you a week ago.” Surprisingly, they did not embrace.

Sam wondered if the woman’s shrill voice would cause crystal to crack.

“I’m glad to see you again, Mother,” Catherine said. “May I present my husband Captain Sam Wyllie, formerly of Barrington, New Hampshire, a Captain in the Revolution, and now an owner of a respected horse farm in Cumberland Falls, Kentucky.”

Sam bowed slightly. “It is a pleasure to meet you, Mrs. Forbes.”

“Well, he is quite tall and muscular,” the woman observed, eyeing him. “But why is he dressed like that?” She addressed the question to Catherine.

“Mother, buckskins are what many frontier men prefer. It is more suitable attire for the wilderness,” Catherine answered.

“Well! He’s not in the wilderness now, is he?” she said. “He will have to find more suitable clothing soon.”

Cantankerous sack of wind, Sam thought. “Will Mr. Forbes be joining us?” he asked her.

“I’m afraid my husband is occupied at the moment in his office, but he will be here when he finishes his business.”

Catherine picked their boy up. “Mother, this is my son, Rory.”

“Oh,” was all the woman managed as she peered into the child’s face, her brows drawn and her hands clasped tightly together.

“He’s your grandson, Mother,” Catherine tried again.

Mrs. Forbes took a closer look. “He looks like this man,” she said pointing to Sam. “It’s a shame he doesn’t look more like you.”

Sam cleared his throat to keep from saying anything.

“Please sit down Mr. Wyllie. You’re towering over all of us,” Mrs. Forbes told him, taking a seat herself in a straight-backed chair. She sat with her hands folded in her lap and a forced smile on her overly rouged lips.

Catherine sat Rory back on the rug, put the rattle in his hand, and took a seat on a large carved mahogany sofa covered in velvet the color of a fine red wine. Sam took a seat beside her and took hold of her hand. He felt a slight tremble and gave her hand a squeeze. Then, feeling protective of Catherine, he put his arm around her shoulders.

Even that small gesture caused Catherine’s mother to raise her brows and look away. She pretended to study the numerous portrait oil paintings, undoubtedly Catherine’s ancestors, hanging high on the room’s walls.

Sam gazed up at the portraits too. Why did he get the feeling they were all frowning down at him?

The uncomfortable tension in the room lessened momentarily when two young servants entered. One carried a tea tray and the other a platter with assorted cookies. They set the trays down and scurried out of the room without speaking or smiling.

Catherine handed a piece of shortbread to Rory.

“He’ll get the carpet dirty, Catherine,” Mrs. Forbes scolded.

Catherine gave the woman a withering look. “That’s what children do, Mother. I’m sure a few crumbs won’t hurt the carpet.”

“I will have the entire room cleaned after you go upstairs to your rooms.”

Sam made up his mind right there. “We won’t be staying here,” he told her. “We’ll secure a room at an inn in town.”

He wanted to leave now. But he’d come a long way to give Mr. Forbes a piece of his mind and set the man straight, if that were even possible.

### CHAPTER 3

“You are right, of course,” Edward said. “You do hardly know me. It is inappropriate for me to ask you to travel with me to Boston. I beg your forgiveness for my brashness.”

“It’s only about seventy-five miles, Mr. Wyllie. Perhaps it would be good to have an escort rather than travel with strangers. I’ll send my father a missive letting him know I’ll be returning a few days later than I originally planned. I would enjoy having more pleasant company than I did on my trip here. The somewhat shabby carriage, drawn by horses that had seen better days, took all day and my fellow passengers were three unwashed gentlemen with roaming eyes.”

He chuckled a little and so did she. How long had it been since he’d laughed?

“I’ll be certain to bathe again before Wednesday then,” he said, still chuckling. But he couldn’t promise that his own eyes wouldn’t roam over her. Dora’s figure was quite voluptuous even in her modest black gown. Even now, he had to force his eyes to stay above her chest.

“Well, shall we see if your infamous uncles are watching the house?” he asked.

“How on earth will we do that?” she questioned, appearing intrigued.

“Follow me.” He led her down a long hall, through several rooms and out the back door. The sun hung low in the sky now, and strong rays splayed through the branches of the massive oaks that graced his back lawn. They walked through the trees and then behind several neighbors’ yards coming out on the street about four homes further south of his house. Hidden behind a large oak’s trunk, he peered down the road and spotted two men hiding behind a tree near his home.

“Your husband’s uncles?”

“I’m afraid so,” she said, grimacing.

“Wait here. Don’t let them see you.” He snuck up on the men, his hand resting on his pistol, and said loudly, “Good evening, Sirs! Is there something I can help you find? Hidden treasure perhaps?”

Startled, the two balding, overweight men gaped up at him with wide eyes. One of them looked as though he might swoon.

“Why, whatever do you mean?” the other one asked, his voice rather shaky. “Who are you?”

“I am Mrs. William’s guardian angel. I work with Gabriel. That shot you fired today came entirely too close and I was summoned here.”

“But you don’t look like an angel,” one protested.

“Angels take on the appearance of men when the occasion demands it. How else could people ‘entertain angels unaware’ as it says in Hebrews? You have read the Bible, haven’t you?”

“Why yes, of course,” one stammered. “Most every Sunday.”

“You are to leave Mrs. Williams alone from now on. She does not know the location of any hidden treasure. If you persist in bothering her with your crackbrained fantasy to uncover buried gold, I will have both of you thrown in the local jail until such time as a ship arrives needing fresh slaves. So unless your hands are calloused enough to handle that type of work, which I highly doubt, I suggest you leave at once and return to Boston. By the way, I’m also the guardian angel for the sheriff in Boston. I will introduce you to him should you ever try to bother her there.”

The faces of both men blanched.

“Do you understand?” he asked them, squinting his eyes.

“Yes, yes,” they both stammered at once.

“Good. Leave Barrington now!” he told them. He kept his eyes narrowed and his voice firm and made a point to grip his pistol a little tighter.

“But it’s nearly nightfall,” the older one protested.

“Now!” Edward repeated. “If Mrs. Williams or I see you in Barrington again, I will see to it that you are stripped, tarred and feathered. I’ve already made clear what else might await you. Men

who bully women are poorly tolerated by those of us who guard them.”

Both men turned abruptly, ran down the street to their waiting horses tied to a large tree, mounted clumsily, and hurried away.

Edward noticed a musket sheathed on one saddle. It was a wonder the two bumbling fools didn't actually shoot Dora instead of just trying to frighten her.

Behind him, he could hear her giggling again. The happy sound warmed his cold heart just a bit.



Dora could not help but laugh at the sight of the two portly men running toward their mounts as though they were being chased by an apparition.

Wyllie strolled casually toward her, his hands locked together behind him, with a look of satisfaction on his handsome face. Was it wrong of her to notice his good looks? How could she keep from noticing?

“What on earth did you say to them, Mr. Wyllie?” she asked. “They looked as though they’d seen a ghost.”

“I’ll tell you, but only if you let me take you to dinner,” he said with a wide grin, revealing his exceptionally nice teeth.

“I must confess, I’m starving and would enjoy some company at dinner. I’ve eaten so many meals alone over the last seven months, the thought of not having to endure another one is extremely appealing.” Nearly all of her close friends were married and she was never comfortable being the odd person at dinner parties. Especially when her dark moods and dark clothing kept her from being good company. She even loathed her own company. She was constantly in a state of turmoil, wondering what she should do with the rest of her life now that she was a widow. Her orderly world was now disorderly. And the only affection she felt from one day to the next was from her father. Perhaps it was time for her to enjoy the companionship of someone like this fine man.

“Shall we?” he asked, gallantly extending his elbow.

She took it and he led her to the house, now well-lit with candles and oil lamps. He called for his carriage and, as soon as it was brought around, he helped her up. They rolled away as darkness descended on the peaceful town.

But her insides were anything but peaceful. Sitting next to him now caused her heart to beat a little uncomfortably and her stomach to flip flop. She had never experienced that with her husband, not even on their wedding night. All she remembered was being nervous and scared.

But then Mr. Wyllie was nothing like her late husband. Charles was a far smaller man, both in height and the breadth of his shoulders. And although a man from Boston's gentry, Charles was not nearly as polished. Gallant and charming, Wyllie gave the appearance of wealth, both in his dress and mannerisms, without the pretentiousness often associated with it.

Nevertheless, it was more than that. She sensed a distinct connection to this man. As though her soul were comfortable with his.

"As I recall, you are staying at the Hartwell Inn?" Wyllie asked.

"That's correct."

"Would you mind if I suggested another location for dinner?"

"You know the establishments here far better than I, Sir."

"I recommend the White Swan Tavern and Cook Shop," he said. "It has a fine assortment of liquors, wines, brandy, and other spirits. And an elegant atmosphere."

"And the food?" she asked, with a laugh.

"The best in town," he said and gave the reins a snap.

The horse picked up its trot and they were soon pulling up to the White Swan. Wyllie tied the reins and hurried to her side to help her down.

He gripped her hands in his and their warmth and strength surprised her. They felt nothing at all like her husband's hands had. How can two men's hands feel so different?

They made their way inside and Wyllie was warmly greeted by the proprietor who escorted them to a candlelit table by the fire. The



orange and crimson flames danced merrily and the burning wood's scent mixed with the tantalizing aromas of meat sizzling on a roasting spit and bread baking.

As they took their seats, Wyllie nodded his greetings to several gentleman in the room. From the noise level, Dora deduced that issues of the day were being vigorously discussed and hammered out.

"Wine?" Wyllie asked.

"Indeed, Sir. After today I would certainly enjoy a glass."

After a waiter took their order for wine and food, they remained quiet, noticing those around them for a few moments. What was she doing having dinner with a stranger? She had never done anything quite this daring. Then he smiled at her and she understood why she'd done it. Before his warm honest smile, her normal defenses melted away.

"You mentioned you had a store, Mr. Wyllie?" she finally asked to break the awkward silence.

"I do. The largest general store in the city and surrounding area. Would you like to see it?"

"Yes, of course." No woman in her right mind would decline an invitation to visit a large store, she thought but didn't say.

Dora noticed a group of young men seated at a round table next to them telling yarns to one another. One told of exotic places he'd been and strange things he'd seen.

A man with gray hair and deep creases in his weathered face, sat nearby drinking an ale and quietly listening to the younger men.

She wondered if she would ever see more of the world than Boston by the time her hair was that gray.

The older man leaned over toward the young fellows and said in a clear strong voice, "I could tell you the grandest place I've been to, young men."

The one telling the tales at the table motioned for the older man to join them and he did.

"I've been all through these colonies and back again in my long life. And the place I'd like to go to again before I'm planted on the

other side of the sod is Kentucky.”

She glanced over at Wyllie who had turned his ear to better hear.

“That’s where my brothers all moved to,” he whispered. “Kentucky.”

The old man continued wistfully. “I witnessed there in that virgin wilderness a buffalo stampede. They spilled over them hills for so long, I pondered whether they would ever stop. The deafening sound of those mighty animals thundered all around us. They ran for miles through the prettiest grass you’ve ever seen, until their leader finally halted. And I saw countless other game there, so plentiful a man’s stomach is always full. The meadows are lush and dotted with elk and deer. The glorious verdant forests are home to wild turkeys. The stars are more brilliant than any I’ve seen before or since. The hills whisper and the rivers sing. Boone was right. It is a second paradise.”

She sighed and turned her attention back to Wyllie. “I wonder if I’ll ever see a place that magnificent. Parts of Boston are beautiful, but it has grown so terribly busy with the growth around the harbor. Now, it’s swarming with hundreds of ships and people from all over the world.”

“I know. I often travel to Boston on business. I buy most of the goods for my stores there. It’s grown tremendously in the last ten years.”

“When did your brothers leave for Kentucky?”

“Three years ago this spring,” he answered. “All five of them—Sam, John, William, Stephen, and our adopted brother Bear. They all had different reasons for going, but it was largely to help Stephen secure the rich grazing lands opening up there. He owned only a small rocky farm here. But he wanted to raise cattle and make a better life for his family. He dreamed of owning a large parcel of land.”

“Did they take their families?” she asked.

“At the time, only Stephen was married. He and Jane had four daughters. Two died on their journey there.”

“How tragic.”

“Indeed, they were beautiful little girls.”

She noted that his face darkened. “And John, who was a

widower, took his young son Little John.”

She could tell there was more to the story, but decided now was not the time to press him.

“I sure miss all of them. I didn’t realize how much I would.”

“Why didn’t you go as well?” she asked.

“The local economy was booming, especially the mill and ore industries. My store was prospering handsomely and my business ventures expanding. A lot of hard work got me to that point. With my profits, I built the home you visited. I saw no reason to give it all up.”

“I can understand that.”

“But the more important reason was that I did not want to put my family in peril. A thousand mile journey into the wilderness is beyond dangerous. I was not willing to risk the lives of my children on such a perilous journey. I tried to talk my brothers, particularly Stephen, out of going. They wouldn’t listen. Stephen believed life’s dangers can find us no matter our place.”

*His children? Hadn’t he said he had none?*

Dora waited for him to continue, sensing he had more to say.

“As it turned out, Stephen was right and I was wrong.”

## CHAPTER 4

“Mother,” Catherine said, “how have you been? It’s been three years and I haven’t received any news from you.”

“It’s about time you asked,” Mrs. Forbes replied, sounding as though her feelings were hurt.

If she actually had any, Sam would be surprised.

“I truly want to know,” Catherine tried. “Although I’ve written you several times, you replied just once and your note only demanded that I return to Boston.”

“As you should have. But since you asked, my health is excellent, as always,” she said.

“And what of your many activities?” It was obvious Catherine was attempting to make polite conversation.

“I have been appointed to chair the next charity ball fundraiser. I am still active in Overseers of the Poor and our minister has asked me to head Christ Church’s philanthropic committee. Of course, that was about to happen even before your father made a sizable donation to the committee.” She gazed at Catherine with a bland half smile.

“And how is father?” Catherine asked.

“He is well, although he works sunup to sundown to further his enterprises. He has so many now, I can’t keep up with all that he’s doing.”

Sam asked what businesses her husband was engaged in and soon regretted asking.

She chattered on for some minutes about her husband’s many companies and employees, including a number of merchants, a sail maker, a ship builder, rope producer, dealers in goods from West India, and even a distiller.

With eighty wharves and a harbor large enough to accommodate

five-hundred vessels, according to what Sam read in the paper that morning, Boston was now an important commercial port.

“He also employs a mill owner, several farmers, a surveyor, and a land speculator,” she added. “The last two are investigating possible mining operations in New Hampshire.”

Sam glanced over at Catherine. Her expression grew serious, but Sam shook his head slightly. He wanted to save that discussion for her father.

“You said earlier that your husband is working now. Do you expect him to be occupied much longer?” Sam asked, anxious to get this over with.

Tight-lipped, Mrs. Forbes turned her head toward Sam without moving an inch of her body. “It may take him some time,” she said. “He has two men with him in his study. He told me he was not to be interrupted.”

“Catherine, we will take our leave now,” Sam said. “If your father is too busy to see his daughter and grandson after we have traveled weeks to get here, perhaps we should arrange an appointment with him.” He grabbed his long rifle and picked up Rory.

His son grasped a fistful of Sam’s shoulder-length hair and laid his head contentedly on his shoulder.

“You will be staying here, not in town,” Mrs. Forbes pronounced, a look of unyielding determination on her face. It was not an invitation. It was a directive. “We have managed to avoid a scandal, despite your reckless actions Catherine. No one in our circle of friends knows what has happened to you. It would be better if you weren’t seen in town by anyone until we can figure this all out.”

“There’s nothing to figure out, Mother. Sam saved my life on numerous occasions, treated me with nothing but respect, and has given me more happiness than I ever dreamed possible. I love my life in Kentucky. I love my husband and our beautiful son.”

“And there’s nothing to hide from,” Sam said, keeping his features deceptively composed despite his rising anger. “There is no reason to fear scandal.”

“Oh, but there is, Mr. Wyllie. Catherine’s conduct is quite problematic. To put it in simple terms for you, she chose to travel to

the wilds of Kentucky with a group of five men, four of whom were unmarried, all of whom were strangers, have a baby with one of them, and live in the woods with a penniless frontiersman. It has the makings for a scandal the likes of which are unmatched. Boston society will eat it up with relish. And when English nobility hears of it, and I assure you, they will, Catherine and Brympton House will be forever scorned.”

A look of withdrawal came over Catherine’s face.

It was time to end this. “Mr. Forbes can contact me at the inn at his convenience,” Sam told Mrs. Forbes.

“I’m certain you will want to hear his offer, Mr. Wyllie,” the woman stated. “Perhaps you could wait a while longer.”

Sam shook his head. “I will not wait even a minute longer. I can’t imagine what he would want to offer me. I was offering him a chance to see his daughter and grandson. But if he’s too busy...”

“Sam...” Catherine started.

“We’re leaving,” Sam said adamantly.

“I see this man continues to force you to his will,” Mrs. Forbes snapped.

“He has *never* forced me to do anything,” Catherine swore.

“He forced you to move to Kentucky. To a land of savages and ruffians. He snatched up the land Mr. Adams left you in his will.”

How did Mrs. Forbes know what was in Mr. Adams’ will? Sam wondered.

“Sam did no such thing!” Catherine protested.

“Your late husband acquired that acreage in Kentucky because he planned to partner with your father and use that land for a mill operation that would supply all of Kentucky and Virginia with lumber. Ten-thousand acres of timber could have been ours. Now it’s his! And you even said in your letter that you gave away a thousand acres to his brother. You just gave it away!”

Catherine did deed a thousand acres to Stephen, however his brother planned to repay her in cattle. But Sam saw little point in interrupting the woman’s tirade.

Mrs. Forbes pointed a yellowed nail at Sam's face. "He obviously married you for your wealth," her mother accused, looking over at her daughter again.

"That's a lie!" Catherine shouted.

"Worse, he forced you to bear his child. Now look at the awful mess we have to fix!"

"What?" Catherine demanded. "My family is not a 'mess' as you so unkindly refer to them. And no one need fix anything, except perhaps your hateful attitude."

"Catherine, when you were widowed, you should have returned home. That would have been the proper thing to do. Your father could have found you a *suitable* husband." She glanced over and sneered at Sam when she said the word.

"Sam is a suitable husband!" Catherine hissed through her teeth. "In fact, he's far more than suitable."

"I doubt that. I suspect he had nothing more to his name than a horse and a rifle when you met him."

The undeniable truth in the statement angered Sam even further.

Worse, he hated seeing Catherine grow upset. Her beautiful face was flushed, her neck showed numerous red blotches, and her wide blue eyes burned with indignation.

Mrs. Forbes countered Catherine's glare with an icy stare of her own and continued unabated. "As you know, you come from a respectable family. We cannot afford scandal. It would be disastrous to my position in society and your father's businesses."

Sam knew that Catherine's family was part of Boston's social and cultural elite, often called the upper sort. But he had not expected this kind of snobbery from the woman. He had hoped that their child might have softened the despicable woman's heart, but that clearly was not the case. She virtually ignored Rory, giving their son only an occasional annoyed glance when he cooed or gurgled.

But what disappointed him even more was how Mrs. Forbes' comments must be hurting Catherine. The woman's words were so hard he was sure her heart could cut glass. If her mother was this cold, he could only imagine what her father must be like. Sam was about to give the woman a lesson in common courtesy when

Catherine spoke up.

“If marrying for love is scandalous, then so be it. I don’t care one iota about society’s opinion of me. You, however, will have to contend with the biggest scandal ever to unfurl through Boston because I’m proud to be married to this man. And I don’t care who knows. In fact, the more people that know I’m in love with him, the better.”

Mrs. Forbes sighed in exasperation. “Our world is not made for something as insubstantial and fleeting as love. Women of our rank marry for position and fortune—not love,” she told Catherine. “Emotions are fickle and not to be trusted. We marry for alliances, preferably with aristocratic New England families like ours that are descended from landowners in England.”

It was clear to Sam that that was exactly what this woman married for. She was a woman who would only be at ease with a man of means and status.

“Mother, against my better judgment I complied with father’s wishes and married for position and fortune once—to elevate and cement our social standing. When Mr. Adams was murdered I swore I would never do so again. Marriage without love was miserable and lonely. That is precisely why I did not return here. I knew Father would force me to *his will*, as you say.”

“Catherine, you were raised properly. Surely you know a widow of your rank, a member of the upper sort, does not run off with strange men to the wilds of Kentucky and then bear children with them. It’s positively outrageous. Your name, our name, will be ruined or sullied beyond repair if this gets out.”

Catherine appeared on the verge of tears. She was too exhausted to stand up to this kind of verbal assault.

“Mrs. Forbes,” Sam interrupted, “this conversation is pointless. Catherine and I are happily married and now have a healthy son. I desire to meet with your husband to be certain he understands what kind of man I am. You have obviously already drawn your own conclusions about that and if your mind is already made up, I won’t bother to try to change it. My wife is tired from our long journey and needs to rest—not be upset by you. Please tell Mr. Forbes he may call upon me at the Bell In Hand Inn.”

She raised her fine arched eyebrows. “Well, that won’t be possible.”



“Why not?” he asked.

“He will not discuss such matters in a public place!”

“Then he can suggest another location—other than here.”

“And what pray tell is wrong with our home?” she asked, affronted.

“In short, you, Madame. I have never, in my forty years of life encountered a surlier, more pompous, uncaring woman.”

Mrs. Forbes’ eyes were in danger of popping out of her head. “Well, you’ve certainly shown your true colors.”

“Mrs. Forbes, it is astonishing to me that you actually raised Catherine—a kind, loving, courageous woman who epitomizes grace.”

Catherine gripped the edge of a chair and turned her back on her mother. “I was raised largely by my nursery maid and my nanny.” Her voice sounded disheartened. “And by my dear grandfather during my frequent visits to England.”

“From what I’ve seen, that was definitely for the best,” he told Catherine. “Time to go!”

Mrs. Forbes pointed to Rory. “And take that, that, child you spawned with you.”

Catherine groaned, closed her eyes, and started to sway.

“Here!” He thrust Rory into Mrs. Forbes arms and took a quick step toward Catherine. He scooped her up in his arms just as she swooned. “I believe our *warm* welcome has worn thin, Mrs. Forbes. Follow me to my carriage and please have the footman bring my rifle and Rory’s things.”

“But, but, but...” Mrs. Forbes stammered as Rory woke and grabbed for one of her dangling earrings. “Lucius! Hurry!”

Sam heard her shrill yell as he hurried toward their waiting carriage.

## CHAPTER 5

Dora took another sip of her red wine and peered intently at Wyllie. “Why was your brother Stephen right? Why were you wrong? I don’t understand.” Her words hung between them like a bridge she hoped he would cross.

A look of sadness passed over his handsome clean-shaven face. He sighed heavily and his eyes grew pensive. “Perhaps we should discuss that later. I fear it will ruin our dinner if I explain further.”

“Of course,” she readily answered.

“Enough about me and my family. Tell me about yourself, Dora. Were you deeply in love with your late husband, if I may ask?”

“We were only married a few months before he grew ill. And we were close, but it was more like friends are close. And, as it is with most young people in Boston’s gentry, our marriage was a business arrangement that our fathers made. Their bargaining chips being his son’s inheritance and my dowry. Of course, since Charles passed away before his father, there was no inheritance.”

“Do your parents live in Boston?”

“My mother and many of our close family members, including my two brothers, passed during the Revolution.”

“Were you and your mother close?”

“Yes very. My mother’s father was an English diplomat to Spain, which is where he met my grandmother. My mother was extremely loving and kind.”

“And your father?”

“My father is Douglas Tudor, a lawyer. He studied law in the office of John Adams and was admitted to the Massachusetts Bay Colony Bar in 1773, the same year I was born.”

“I’ve heard of your father. He’s considered a leading citizen of Boston. Where is your home?”

“My family home is on Court Street, near Bowdoin Square. But I now live in my late husband’s home on Beacon Hill. I’m afraid I won’t be able to pay the taxes on it next year, or continue to pay the large bill for the servants’ wages. I’ll be forced to move soon.”

“How unfortunate,” Edward said.

“I don’t know. I’ve grown tired of living alone in that big house anyway. I want to travel. To see the rest of our young country. Most of my friends were born, live, and will die in Boston without traveling twenty miles from the place of their birth.”

“Perhaps the proceeds from the sale of the home will permit you to do so.” His voice was kind and soothing.

“No, the home belongs to Charles’ father, who wants it back.”

“What will you do then?”

“When I run out of funds, my father will ensure that I have whatever funds I need and I will live with him. However, my preference would be to not be a burden to my father. But for the time being, that’s my only option,” she explained.

“I’m certain you could never be a burden to your father.”

“Do you ever want to leave Barrington? Like your brothers did?”

The question seemed to surprise him.

“Frankly, I’ve never given it much thought. I’ve always had too many reasons to stay. Leaving Barrington was the last thing on my mind. Now though...”

He cut himself off and stared down at the half-eaten and now cold food on his plate. A lock of his dark hair fell onto his high forehead. She could see his breaths quicken as his chest rose and fell under his white shirt and impeccably tied cravat. He suddenly seemed to realize he was slumping in his chair, and he sat a little straighter and tugged back his shoulders. Something weighed on those broad shoulders—something dark and unhappy.

She shivered a little, despite their closeness to the fire.

He reached across the table to grasp her hand but she tucked her hand into her lap before he could.

“Forgive me,” he said. “I don’t know why I did that.”

“I didn’t mean to pull away from you. It’s just that no man has lain a hand on mine in a long time.” Even before he grew ill, her husband rarely touched her affectionately.

“Then we are well suited. For I haven’t held another woman’s hand in a very long time.” His long fingers reached for her hand again.

This time she let him take it in his and at once it gave her a sense of protection. Yet she sensed he was trying to draw strength himself from her touch.

“Mrs. Williams...” he started.

“Please call me Dora.” She started to ask if she could call him Edward, but he withdrew his hand and spoke first.

“I’ve decided not to wait to tell you why I was so wrong about going to Kentucky. I need to confess...there are some matters I need to share with you.” He swallowed and continued, his voice so raspy she hardly recognized it. “My wife and children...died last spring while they were visiting her parents at Bow Lake.”

It was his eyes that revealed his grief more than anything. They sparkled in the dim firelight as he struggled to control his emotions. He also gripped the wine glass in his hand so tightly that she feared it might shatter.

“How did they die?” she asked gently.

“Yellow Fever.”

She shook her head in dismay. “The great killer. Your entire family?”

He nodded gloomily. “Yes, my wife of eight years and my three thriving children—two boys and a girl.” The enormity of his grief contorted his face.

She let out the breath she’d been holding. “Words cannot express my sorrow for your loss, Mr. Wyllie.” She knew the symptoms of Yellow Fever well and tried to banish the horrific images from her

mind. "Yellow Fever killed more than five-thousand people in Boston two years ago. It struck with such ferocity that it spread gloom and fear throughout our city."

"The outbreak here was late spring, one year ago. I remained behind in Barrington to manage my store while Anne took the children to visit their grandparents. Her parents live near a lake that the children loved to swim in. The weather was unusually warm and they were out of school for a few days. Her mother told me that Anne and the children spent two days picnicking and swimming before they grew ill."

"At least they all had a few joyous days together," she said, hoping it was some small consolation.

"So you see, the terrible irony of it is that I chose not to go to Kentucky because I wanted to keep them all safe. But by staying, I killed them."

"You didn't kill them!"

"I did," he insisted. "If I had trusted God, as Stephen did, to keep us safe on the journey, then they would all be alive. I didn't have the courage that Stephen and the others had to step out on faith. The Lord made me pay dearly for that."

"You don't know that they would still be alive. You said earlier that two of your brother's daughters did not survive the journey. If the Lord was punishing you, why did he also so chastise Boston, New York, and Philadelphia? Or perhaps those outbreaks weren't chastisements at all. But rather misfortunes or calamities that have no explanation."

She could see that he wanted to believe her. But he could not easily set down the guilt and burden that he'd carried so close to his heart for more than a year.

"But I put my own ambition and goals ahead of my brothers. Stephen desperately wanted all five of us to go together, to protect one another. And Sam, one of the most courageous battle-hardened men in these colonies, could not understand my fear. I just didn't have the courage that he did."

"Mr. Wyllie..."

"I meant to say this earlier, please call me Edward."

“Edward, a man must do what his heart leads him to. Your heart told you to stay. That was the right decision for *you*, even though it may not have been for your brothers.”

Pain filled his eyes. “But it wasn’t the right decision for my children. When I went to the graveyard earlier, I was going to finally face my children—to tell them I was sorry. That it was my fault,” he said, his voice strained. “I have not yet been able to even look at their headstones. But once again I was a coward. I couldn’t do it.”

“Perhaps that’s because you have nothing to be sorry for and you needed to realize that *before* you face them.”

He shook his head. “No, it’s because I don’t have the courage to actually see their names carved in stone. Facing them will somehow make it more permanent. And I can’t bear to think that.” His obvious anguish almost overcame his control. He cleared his throat and took a sip of wine.

At that moment, she desperately wanted to embrace him—to enfold him in her arms and hug the grief and loneliness out of him. To be sure he understood that it wasn’t his fault. She gripped the skirt of her gown with both fists to keep from reaching out to him in this public place. “That’s not cowardice, Edward. That’s love. You want to remember them as they were—happy and healthy.”

“Odd that you should say that. That’s exactly what I was doing when I heard you coming up the path. I was picturing them frolicking in those woods.”

“Edward, the headstones are just markers. They’re not there. Their souls are in heaven in the presence of God. They are happy beyond our understanding and no doubt living in an even finer mansion than yours.”

“You are so wise, Dora,” he said in a low voice. He seemed more comfortable now, as though something might have clicked in his mind.

Perhaps some of her words made sense to him. She found the thought gratifying. Maybe they met today for a reason. “I’m not so wise. I’m just able to reason through things—I get that from my father. He’s the most logical man in Boston,” she said, grinning at him. “That’s why he is such a respected lawyer and wins most of his cases. Don’t even try to argue with him. He wins every time.” She took another sip of her wine and realized she was feeling its relaxing

effects. Fatigue was beginning to settle in her body like a heavy blanket, but her heart beat with a new excitement that she couldn't explain.

Silence again fell between them. But this time, it wasn't an awkward silence. It was the kind that comes between two people who have shared something significant with each other. They now understood one another and were comfortable without words.

After some moments, Edward cocked his head and peered at her as though he were weighing a decision. "Tomorrow I have to go to Wyllie Mountain to meet with a surveyor and geologist who have been there all week. My brother Sam wrote and asked me to investigate the possibility of a mining operation there. I'm to report the results to him in Boston. Would you like to join me? You'll have a nice view of Mount Webster from Wyllie Mountain. It will take all morning to get there. I'll meet with the two men and then we can get a couple of rooms at the inn in Crawford Notch, have dinner again, and leave early the next morning to come back to Barrington. The day after, we can leave for Boston."

"Yes, of course. I am extremely interested in seeing my land and actually learning about mining." She left unsaid that she was even more interested in learning more about him and figuring out why he created this strange tingle of excitement inside her.

"Excellent. I shall be delighted to have your company."

"Perhaps I could hire the surveyor and geologist to look at Mount Webster too. That land is the only thing of any real value that my husband left me in his will. As I said, our home belongs to his father, but Mount Webster was his, inherited from his mother. I had no idea what to do with it."

"I'm certain you could contract with them to survey and study your land as well."

"Are the two reputable?" she asked.

"The geologist is a professor at Yale. The surveyor came highly recommended by a man who runs a mining operation just west of where our mountains are."

Her pulse quickened at the possibility that her land might contain deposits of gold—real gold—not some fairytale legend.

“Do you ride or should I bring a carriage?” he asked.

“I enjoy riding. Just bring me a gentle mare or a gelding. Stallions are a bit too high-headed for me.”

“I have a gelding that I’m sure will fall in love with you and vice versa. The weather promises to be nice and the forest will have fully embraced spring. It should be a lovely day.”

Catching his enthusiasm, she smiled. “That does sound marvelous after all the bitterly cold ice and snow we’ve endured. It has been a long dreary winter.” *And far too lonely.*

“Well then, here’s to our mountains,” he toasted.

She held up the last of her wine. “May they each hold treasures after all.”



## CHAPTER 6

When you've been grieving for a long time, it feels strange not to be unhappy. Edward rode his stallion to the Hartwell Inn where Dora was staying, feeling alive for the first time in many long, dreary months. The sunrise on the horizon seemed more beautiful than normal, the birds' melodies sweeter, the air fresher. Even his horse seemed more energetic than usual. It was as if the heavy shroud that had encircled him had suddenly unfolded, revealing the world again.

Were the unfamiliar feelings the beginnings of forgiving himself? If so, he welcomed the prospect.

The conversation at the White Swan must have been exactly what he needed. It wasn't just the company of an attractive woman. It was what she had to say to him. Before drifting off to a peaceful sleep, something he did rarely of late, he had pondered everything Dora said. He decided he would muster the courage to accept what she told him. Gather the mettle to rejoin the world of the living. To conquer his guilt and doubts.

Perhaps she was right and it wasn't his fault. As he recalled her kind words, they touched his core like warm sunshine, thawing his ice-covered heart. She was spring personified. Warmth. Life. Renewal. Hope.

Everything she said made sense. Perfect sense if the truth be told.

As he grew to know her better, she seemed almost perfect too. Beautiful, intelligent, well-mannered, and well-spoken with a silky smooth voice. But more than that, her heart was as beautiful as she was.

But no woman was flawless. Try as he might, though, he couldn't think of one shortcoming. Perhaps he had been too hasty in deciding that he no longer desired the company of a woman. Or perhaps he just needed the right woman to make him see that.

When he arrived at the inn, he tied his stallion and the gelding

he'd towed behind him for her to ride. He straightened his coat, polished his black boots against his calves, and raked his fingers through his hair. Striding into the inn, he found her finishing her breakfast at a dining table. "Good morning Dora!" he said cheerily as he approached her.

She looked radiant. Her smooth complexion almost glowed and her eyes sparkled. She wore a blue riding habit that showed off her figure. A black band on her arm signified that she was still mourning. As most women did during a mourning period, she wore little jewelry. Just small black stone tear-drop earrings.

"Good morning, Edward," she replied and stood. "I was just finishing."

"Do you need more time?"

"No, I never eat a large breakfast. Are you ready?"

"Indeed, I'm anxious to be on our way." He threw down enough coins to more than cover her meal and picked up her little overnight bag.

"Thank you, kind Sir." With an adventurous toss of her head, she said, "Let's go then."

As they headed north at an easy gallop, he could see the mountains in the distance, snow still clinging tenaciously to their tallest peaks. But here in the forest north of town, the Dogwood trees were in full bloom, their white fluffy blossoms replacing the snow flurries of winter that so often drifted through these same woods. The scenery was so beautiful, Edward slowed their horses' pace to a walk so they could savor it. He took a deep breath, savoring the fragrance of morning and the blossoming flowers. He could hear birds chattering among the tree branches. Everything about the day seemed fresh and pure.

His gaze roamed over toward Dora. She rode well, helping the horse to move smoothly by matching the movement of the reins in her fist to the rhythmic motion of the gelding. "His name is Archibald," he called over to her.

She chuckled. "A bit prim for a horse don't you think?"

"I just bought him recently. Give him another name if you like."

"How about Archy?"

“That’s perfect! Archy it is.”

“What’s your stallion’s name?” she asked.

“Longshanks.”

“Now that fits him. He is a long-legged fellow.” She turned her head back to the road.

But he continued to study her for a moment, unable to pull his eyes away. Something intense flared within him. She radiated a vitality that drew him to her with a dizzying force. This undeniable and unforeseen attraction was a complication that he didn’t anticipate. Perhaps inviting her along had been a mistake. He forced himself to look away from her.

For the better part of an hour they rode in silence, alternating the horses’ pace between a walk, a trot, and a gallop. But no matter their speed, every time his gaze met hers, his heart raced within his chest.



Dora was acutely aware of the sensuous aura that connected them as they rode side by side, nearly in unison. She’d known the man less than twenty-four hours, yet the emotional connection between them already felt deep-rooted and longstanding.

Never had a man affected her so dramatically and so swiftly.

She could sense that he was trying to be the epitome of a gentleman. And she had every intention of behaving as a lady of breeding should. But if the longing between them grew any stronger, they would both be tempting the other dangerously. Did she make a mistake coming on this short trip with him? She wanted and needed to see the land that she now owned, and this seemed like the perfect opportunity. Coming here with him was certainly better than venturing out on her own. She resolved to make her behavior as formal and decorous as she could without offending him.

They soon began to see and hear signs of mining activity as they approached the higher elevations. They passed a steady stream of men, most of whom worked in the iron ore mines, who rode mules and horses. Burros carried their supplies and oxen-pulled their wagons. Here and there a dog barked begging for a handout. She wished she’d brought along the scraps from breakfast to give to them.

Someday, she wanted to have a dog of her own.

The sharp fragrance of animal dung littered the well-traveled road. In the distance, they could hear what Edward said was a sawmill, working hard to keep up with the demand for the lumber used in the mines. Here and there, tents and crude cabins sprang up among the trees.

“With the first unearthing of gold in these mountains, less than a year ago, land speculators began arriving. One even contacted me. The man knew the mountain belonged to my brother Sam, but he didn’t know how to contact him. I told him that Sam had moved to Boonesborough and that he should write to him.”

“Did he?”

“No. Sam wrote and told me that a wealthy Boston businessman, who turned out to be his wife’s father, sent men all the way to Kentucky to try to buy the mountain from him. The man should have written because Sam refused to sell. They took desperate measures attempting to force him to sign over the deed, but they failed. You would not find that at all surprising if you knew my brother.”

“If he’s anything like you, I’m sure that’s true. So, it was the wealthy man from Boston who sent the land speculator to you,” she suggested.

“I thought the same after I received Sam’s letter. At the time, though, the speculator never revealed the reason he wanted to buy the mountain or who he was working for.”

“Did you write to Sam and tell him about the land speculator contacting you?” she asked.

“No, I knew Sam wouldn’t sell the mountain anyway. And I haven’t written to my brothers in a year. I couldn’t bear to write to them about the loss of my family.”

“Why did Sam ask you to have the survey and inspection done of his mountain?”

“Sam explained that in his last letter—the one saying he was coming to Boston. He suspected that only the likelihood of gold would have justified sending three men to Kentucky to get him to sell Wyllie Mountain. He’d also read in the papers that the new Treasury Department needs a domestic source of gold and silver. So, Sam wrote

and requested that I arrange for a surveyor and geologist to inspect the property. He asked that I meet him in Boston about the third week in May at the Bell In Hand Inn, a place Sam's wife suggested."

"It's one of my favorite establishments. My father and I eat there quite often. Do you know the owner Jimmy Wilson?"

"No, I've heard of him, but never met him."

"Everybody in Boston knows Jimmy. Not that we had much choice. He was Boston's town crier for fifty years. Good news or bad, we heard it all from Jimmy. He reported on everything from the Boston Tea Party to the election of President Washington. When he retired, he opened the tavern. He was so proud of his former occupation he called the place the Bell In Hand."

After stopping in Crawford Notch to reserve two rooms for that evening, they slowly made their way up Wyllie Mountain. About halfway up, they found the campsite of the geologist and surveyor located exactly where they had told Edward it would be in their missive. After Edward dismounted and assisted her from Archy's broad back, he introduced himself and her to the two scientists, who were just taking their mid-day meal.

"Good afternoon, Sir. I'm Benjamin Renner, Professor of Chemistry, Mineralogy, and Natural History at Yale and this is John Olmsted, your surveyor."

"Have you been able to make a geological and mineralogical survey of the mountain?" Edward asked.

"Yes, I've been studying your mountain all week. The discovery of mineral deposits is rooted in careful scientific work," Renner explained. "I will provide you with a verbal report today and a written report describing the gold deposits at a later date. Eventually, I would also like to publish the report in the Journal of Science and Arts."

"So, you found gold then?" Dora asked.

"We discovered gold-bearing rock this very week," Renner answered with a wide smile. "I am happy to report that the prospects look extremely favorable for a lucrative mine at this location."

She expected Edward to jump up and down with excitement, but he took the news stoically.

Edward turned to the surveyor. "Did you clearly mark the

location of my family's former homestead—where my father, mother, and sister were buried beneath the landslide? That land is sacred to my family and we do not want it disturbed.”

“Yes indeed, Mr. Wyllie, exactly as you outlined in your letter. We can hire laborers for you to fence the area off from mining operations or you can wait until you hire a mine operator,” Olmsted said.

“I want it done right away,” Edward instructed.

“I’ll see to it and send you the bill,” Olmsted replied.

“Can we offer you some food and water?” Renner suggested.

“That would be lovely,” Dora said. “It’s been a long time since breakfast.”

Olmsted provided her with a makeshift chair and a plate of ham and beans and a corn cake. Then he prepared a plate for Edward who ate standing up. The simple fare tasted surprisingly good.

“Is that Mount Webster?” she asked the surveyor and pointed off in the distance.

“It is? How did you know its name?” he asked.

“I own it,” she declared and took a bite of corncake. It tasted marvelous. “Did you make these? They’re wonderful.”

“No, my wife sent them along,” Renner said. “She’s always worried that I will starve up here.” He pointed out other landmarks and then asked, “Mrs. Williams do you want us to conduct a similar survey of Mount Webster?”

“Indeed I do,” she answered without hesitation. “Especially if you will allow me some credit terms. I can pay you from the mine’s proceeds if we are able to begin operations. If no gold is found, my father will take care of your fees.”

“We’ll start on it as soon as we finish here. Agreed, Mr. Olmsted?” he asked.

Olmsted nodded his agreement.

“That would be kind of you both,” she told them.

“Mount Webster’s close proximity to what we’ve already discovered makes it possible that you will have your gold mine, Mrs. Williams,” Renner explained and then left and went into his tent.

Dora sat her plate down. “This is somewhat embarrassing, but I find that nature calls, Mr. Olmsted. Would you kindly point me in the direction of some privacy?”

Olmsted gave her directions, telling her exactly where to go.



Edward swallowed the last of his meal and took a drink of the water Renner had provided earlier. “I think I will try to find some privacy myself,” he told Olmsted. “Remind my brother to have a privy built up here.”

“We will, indeed. We’ll be off to continue working now. Perhaps we’ll see you at the inn tonight,” Olmsted said.

Edward nodded. “Yes, we have rooms there for the night. We may see you there.” He took off in a similar direction as Dora had, but veered to the left instead of the right and hiked some distance away. When he’d finished, he turned around to return.

He halted at the sound of a woman’s blood curdling scream.

“Dora!”

He ran blindly, as fast as his long legs would allow, toward the sound. Out of nowhere a sharp drop off, hidden by timber and rocks, suddenly loomed before him. He tried to stop in time, but skidded on the gravel and slid off the hidden ledge. As he fell, his arms flailed wildly, his entire body suspended in air. Hurtling over the cliff, rocks and gravel dropped with him. A second later there was nothing but air below his feet.

*Oh God. Help me!*

At the last instant, he twisted his body and flung his right arm toward the edge of the cliff. Breathing hard, his heart pounding wildly, his hand seized a protruding rock. He held on as tight as he could as his body slammed into the cliff face. He took a desperate gasp of air and managed to lock his left hand onto a small crevice in the rock.

What had he done? He needed to help Dora. She could be hurt. Or worse. "You senseless bloody fool," he swore at himself.

He had to get help. "Help!" he yelled at the top of his lungs. "Help!"

But no help came. The two men must have gone back to work already.

"Dora can you hear me?" he shouted. He heard nothing. Where was she?

His fingers began to sting and pain spread through his shoulders. He chanced a quick glance down. A gaping ravine stretched thousands of feet below. The terrifying sight made him press his body closer to the cliff face. The scent of ancient rock and soil filled his panting lungs.

He had to do something. If he died he wouldn't be able to help her.

He pressed the toes of his boots against the cliff wall trying to feel for a place that would support him, something, anything that he could use for a foothold. When he found nothing, he moved his right toe a little higher and to his right, careful not to lose his grip. His right boot finally found a toehold. Just enough to gain purchase. He had to drag himself up—his arms burned and threatened to cramp. They wouldn't hold his weight much longer.

No matter what, he had to get up. He had to save Dora.

He could see exposed tree roots just above him. If he could just reach them. He pushed off his right foot and thrust his right hand upwards. The effort propelled him mere inches, just enough to grab hold of the pine's root with his right hand. He risked releasing his left hand, shot it upward toward the root, and frantically gripped it with both hands.

Slowly, fistful by fistful, he hauled himself up, grasping more of the tree's roots as he rose until he was fully on the ledge. He scooted up next to the tree. For a mere moment, he rested his back against the pine's trunk and drew a couple of deep breaths into his lungs. *Thank you Lord. Now help me find Dora.*

Lying down on his stomach and gripping the ledge, he peered down and then to his right and left. Foliage covered much of the cliff,



making it difficult to see anything. Where had she landed? Was she alive? Or had she fallen to her death? The thought made his heart clench as he stood. He swallowed the bile of dread rising up in his throat. *No!*

He would find her! He had to. He was her guardian angel.

“Dora!”

## CHAPTER 7

Sam gently deposited Catherine on the seat inside their coach. He stroked her cheek with his hand and relief filled him as her eyelids fluttered open.

“What happened?” she asked.

“I believe your fatigue and the reception we received got the best of you and you swooned,” Sam told her. “Do you feel all right?”

“I feel fine, but I’ve never fainted before in my entire life. Where is Rory?”

“I gave him to your mother to hold,” Sam began.

“Sam, you didn’t!”

Sam glanced outside the carriage. Lucius was now holding Rory while their driver reloaded their baggage. “I had no choice. I had to catch you before you fell. But your mother quickly handed him off to Lucius. The man’s sitting right outside the carriage, making funny faces at Rory.”

“He used to do the same to me,” she said wistfully and then straightened on the seat.

“I’ll speak to the coachman, get Rory, and we’ll be off. Rest for a minute.”

He hopped out and quietly spoke to the driver, giving him instructions on where to take them. Then he approached Lucius who sat holding Rory, on an iron bench by the door. “Thank you for your help,” he told him.

“You are most welcome, Sir. The maid set your rifle and bag right there behind you,” Lucius said, pointing. “I’ll load it for you in a minute.”

Sam took Rory who clutched Mrs. Forbes diamond and sapphire

drop earring in his chubby hand. That pair of earrings must have cost Mr. Forbes far more than Sam had ever made in a year. He handed it to Lucius.

“Yes, she will want this back. She was too distraught to notice that the child had it. Is Mrs. Wyllie all right?”

“Yes,” Sam answered. “She was just overwrought.” He turned and climbed into the carriage.

After Sam sat down, Lucius handed him the rifle and Rory’s bag and then stuck his head inside the carriage. “Have a pleasant stay in town and I hope we’ll see you again real soon. Goodbye, Mrs. Wyllie.”

“Goodbye Lucius,” she answered.

The driver took off and slowly made his way back to the road.

Sam decided to wait to discuss their conversation with her mother until Catherine had rested. He searched his mind trying to find something positive to say. “It was a beautiful home,” he finally said.

Catherine shook her head. “It’s not a home. It’s my father’s palace.”



Sam and Catherine stepped into their suite at the Bell In Hand Inn. It was a lovely room. Bright, airy, and decorated in a pale shades of blue and pure white.

“What a pleasant room,” she told Sam.

“I asked him for his best. Fortunately, since it’s a Wednesday, this suite was not already occupied,” Sam told her. He peered out the lacy curtains to the street below. He spotted the man who had been following them since they left the mansion. He was coming out the inn’s entrance, just below the establishment’s sign bearing a large painted bell. The fellow mounted and took off, riding back toward Catherine’s home.

Catherine sat in a chair and laid Rory in her lap. “Did you ask that a cradle be brought up?”

“Yes, it’s on its way.” They heard a knock on the door. “That’s probably it now.”

A man brought the cradle in and a maid followed behind carrying a tray of refreshments.

“When I signed us in, I ordered some tea for you,” Sam said. “And some brandy for me.”

“Splendid,” Catherine replied. “Thank you. I may want some of both.”

After the man sat the cradle next to their bed, he asked Sam, “Would you like a fire for warmth, Sir?”

“That would be nice. It may be cool this evening,” Sam answered.

“And would you like a bath filled?” the maid asked Catherine.

“Yes, after we’ve had a chance to settle in. Thank you. And plenty of towels too, please.”

“I’ll go set your water to warming,” the maid said. “I’ll be back later.”

The male servant retrieved some firewood and kindling and soon had a nice fire blazing.

Sam gave both a generous tip and then unpacked their things while Catherine nursed Rory.

When she finished, Catherine nestled Rory in the cradle for a nap, and then took a seat by the hearth. The fire blazed cheerily and a nice pile of wood was stacked nearby. He poured the tea for Catherine and a brandy for him.

“I’m sure you need that after that unpleasant confrontation with my mother,” she said.

“You may need it more than I. Are you sure you’re up to discussing that? It can wait until tomorrow after you’ve rested.”

“Yes, if we don’t talk about it neither one of us is likely to sleep well.” She took a sip of her tea and sighed.

“God in heaven, your mother is a cruel woman,” he told her.

“Indeed. But I don’t think she believes she is. She actually thinks she’s looking out for me.”

“She’s looking out for herself. And I suspect your father is too.”

“That I do not doubt. Sam, what are we to do? We’ve come all this way and he wouldn’t even see us.”

“You think he was deliberating avoiding us?”

“I do. If he had been away on business, I could understand. But he was just down at the end of the hall. After all these years, I should no longer be surprised by his capacity for incivility.”

“I think he avoided us because he suspects that I know he sent those men. And that he authorized them to kill me once they had the signed deed to my mountain. If I was dead, you would have no reason to stay in Kentucky.”

“He wants me back in Boston.”

“He wants your fortune, not you Catherine. For him it’s all about economics. His heart is ruled by the need for fortune and power.”

“I wish we’d never come.” She sounded on the verge of tears.

“We had to. You had to try to at least reconcile and I wanted a chance to confront the man. I don’t want him sending more men to Kentucky to try to manipulate either one of us. If it doesn’t work, at least we tried.”

“Sam, my father employs several powerful lawyers. I’m worried that he will make trouble for us somehow.”

“No doubt. If he does, we’ll just have to leave. I asked Edward to come here to meet with us, thinking you would want to stay in Boston. Once he arrives and we’ve had a chance to visit with him for a few days, we’ll leave for home. Or if we stay a bit longer, we can go to his home in Barrington for a visit.”

“Pour me a small brandy, will you Sam?”

He handed her the brandy and then took a sip of his. “Don’t worry, Catherine. Your father and mother no longer control your life. Now, you do. No one else. Not even me.”

She smiled warmly and he marveled at her beauty. Her nearly black hair glistened in the fire’s light, her high cheekbones were flushed, and her full lips moist with tea. Even after nearly three years, he still couldn’t believe she had agreed to marry him. At the time, he possessed nothing besides his capacity for hard work and protecting his family. And he had no idea that she was the heiress to a fortune

until after they married, on their honeymoon, when she reluctantly confessed to her wealth. She also admitted that she owned ten-thousand acres in Kentucky, land that her late husband had willed to her.

“You’re the one who made me realize I had control over my life,” she said. “That my destiny was in my own hands—not my father’s. That’s the reason I found the courage to go on to Kentucky with you and your family.”

“And it is in your hands. Don’t let him or her bully you. Even though you’ve come back to their turf, you are still in control.”

She nodded and took a sip of the brandy. “We need to hold him accountable for what he’s done and at least give him one chance to explain himself. But are we just going to wait here until he decides to see us?”

“Yes,” Sam answered. “I want him to come to us. We’ll wait one week. No longer.”

“Agreed. One week.”

## CHAPTER 8

Edward stood on shaky legs still peering down. “Dora!” This time he heard a groan and his heart leapt with relief. “Where are you?”

“Here,” he heard her say in a tremulous voice. “I think I’m below you.”

“I can’t see you,” he shouted, “keep talking until I can figure out where you are.”

“Edward...I thought I was going to die.” She paused for a moment and he hurried toward her raised voice. “The last thought I had was that I might never see you again...I prayed God would spare me so that I could.”

His brows creased as he took in her words and realized their significance. He hurried to his right and found a v-shaped gap in the terrain created by years of rushing rain water. He peered down. There she was, sitting on a little outcrop, leaning her back against the cliff face.

“I see you!” he shouted. “Don’t move. I’ll get you up.”

He quickly decided the best way to retrieve her was to find a rope. “I’m going back to their campsite for a rope. Don’t move at all.”

“Hurry!”

He took off running back to the camp. When he reached it, no one was anywhere around. He went into the tent and tossed crates and bags all over the place searching for a rope. He couldn’t find one anywhere. He ran out of the tent and glanced around frantically. There, leaning against a tree near where the mules were tied, was a good-sized length of rope. He thought about using one of the horses or mules to haul her up, but decided against it. They might spook and fall onto her. He would pull her up himself. He grabbed the coil of rope and sprinted back to the cliff edge.

He called down, “Dora, I’m back. I’ll make a loop and toss the

rope down to you.”

“Edward, I’m afraid. Below me there’s nothing. Nothing at all.” She sounded terrified.

“Don’t worry, as long as you don’t move, you’re not going anywhere.” He spoke as calmly as he could. He didn’t want her to panic. “I’ll have you up in a twinkling.”

He worked to tie a good-sized loop and knot in the rope. For once he was grateful for all the lessons Sam had given him when they were boys on how to tie a strong knot. His oldest brother had taught him many things. He pledged to thank Sam the next time he saw him.

He tested the knot and then began lowering the rope, just above her head, careful not to fall himself.

As soon as it hung beside her, he told her, “Put the loop over your head and press it down, around your hips. Be careful, don’t move your body too much.” He was worried that the outcrop might not support her weight for long if it was too thin.

He could see her hands shaking, but she did as he said.

“That’s good, Dora. Now work the loop downward, closer to your hips.” He didn’t want the rope to tighten around her waist and hurt her insides.

Moving slowly she positioned the rope well below her waist.

“Good, the fullness of your riding habit’s skirt should help to keep the rope from slipping. Are you ready?”

“Yes. Please hurry Edward. Don’t let me fall.”

He stepped back and looped the rope around a nearby tree trunk to use it for leverage. Then he began to pull. He could see gravel and dirt, scraped by the rope, raining down upon her, but it could not be helped. Fortunately, she was slim and he could drag her weight with little difficulty. He prayed the rope would not break as he tugged, handful by handful. His heart pounded. His head throbbed. But his thoughts were only of saving her.

“Hurry, the rope’s slipping!” she yelled.

He quickened and lengthened his reaches down the rope and drew it back again and again. He heaved with all his might, leaning



his hips back and pushing his boot heels into the soil. Finally, her head appeared at the cliff rim. The welcome sight took his breath away momentarily.

He continued pulling, his hands blistering from rope burns.

Lying on her stomach, Dora held the rope in one hand and began to claw at the earth with the other, trying to move further away from the ledge.

He didn't want to let go of the rope until she was a safe distance away from the chasm.

Grunting and breathing hard, she kept wiggling and squirming closer to him.

When she laid firmly on safe ground, he released the rope and ran to her. He dropped to his knees, enveloped her in his arms, and hugged her to him. Then he peered into her eyes, his fingers cupping her dirty cheek. "Are you all right?"

"Yes, thanks to you," she breathed, her chest panting.

"Are you sure?" He looked her over thoroughly. Her hair hung disheveled and dusty and her riding habit was ripped in several places. The black armband had disappeared, undoubtedly torn off as her arms scraped against the cliff rocks. Other than a few scratches, she appeared fine.

He couldn't hold his lips back. He lowered them to hers and kissed her, letting all his relief and concern flow into her. He tried to stop, but couldn't. She tasted like heaven and when she opened her mouth to him the kiss transported him to paradise.

She reached a hand up to hold the back of his neck and she kissed him back with surprising ardor. Her touch sent shivers down his spine and a ripple of heat surged through his loins.

When he finally broke the kiss, she clung to him desperately. "I thought I was going to die." She started weeping against his chest.

He held her protectively. "I thought you had. I called and called for you, but you didn't answer."

"The fall must have knocked the wind out of me," she sobbed. "I can't believe I was so foolish and careless."

"I was too," he admitted. "When you screamed, I ran for you and stupidly slid right off the cliff. The trees hid the chasm and I couldn't stop in time."

"Oh no! Are you all right?" Her tear filled eyes glanced up at him and widened as she took in his roughed up clothing and skinned hands.

He smiled. "Indeed, I've never been better."



When the tears stopped and her heart finally returned to a normal beat, Dora said, "This area is so treacherous. One second I was on solid ground and the next I wasn't."

"I should have known better and warned you that there are areas of unstable soil here," Edward said, as he tightened the cinches on their horses' saddles. "I'm so sorry, Dora. I just wasn't thinking."

"Perhaps I was just careless. I was in a terrible hurry to relieve myself. It was a long ride up here. When I finished, I decided to take a look around. I found a spot with a magnificent view, but didn't realize there was a gap on the ledge. I stumbled, turned my ankle, and then lost my balance."

"Is your ankle injured?"

"No, it's fine. Only my pride is hurt."

"Mine as well. I grew up near here and still I was reckless. I was just so concerned about you, I wasn't thinking clearly. Thankfully, we are both safe and sound. Only our clothing is a bit worse off."

"Fortunately, I brought another riding habit."

"And I brought a clean shirt and cravat. I'll give my pants and coat a good dusting tonight."

They mounted and began their descent down the mountain trail toward Mount Crawford Inn. The trail was rocky and more difficult to descend so Edward kept Longshanks at a slow pace and she held Archy to the same gait.

"That was good news about your family's mountain containing gold deposits," she said. "But you didn't seem elated."

“I’m happy for Sam. As the oldest son, he inherited the mountain. I’m only helping him.”

“Do you think they will find gold on Mount Webster?”

“Renner is a respected geologist. Obviously, he must be to teach at Yale. He’s working up here in the mountains for the summer. I was lucky to get him. Since he thought it possible that it contains gold, I would say yes.”

“Oh Edward, that would mean so much to me—to have my own source of income and not have to be dependent on my father.”

“Even if it doesn’t contain gold. The mountain could always be mined for iron or stone,” he told her.

“Perhaps. Or I could just leave it the way it is. I hope some landowners will leave their mountains untouched.”

“Dora, I must apologize for my behavior back there. I didn’t behave as a gentleman. I was just so relieved that you were safe.”

If she were honest, her own reaction had been equally swift and powerful. “Don’t be sorry. I felt the same. I guess a brush with death will do that. Your kiss reassured me that I was still alive.”

“Facing death is a peculiar thing. It makes you realize that you get only one life. And it makes you want to use that life to find happiness.”

The budding feelings within her begged for release. “It made me realize you could be the one who helps me to find that happiness,” she confessed.

“I think we both understood that even before we faced death.”

His mouth curved with tenderness and it stoked the gently growing fire within her.

## CHAPTER 9

Remington Forbes cursed at his agent John Appleton yet again. With his son well situated on a Virginia tobacco plantation, he had great aspirations for his only daughter and her place in society. And her wealth. She needed *him* to manage it.

This inept man was not helping matters.

"You bloody fool. You mean to tell me that I paid for three of your lackeys to go to Kentucky and that one was killed and the other two only succeeded in being caught, whipped, fined, and sent back to Boston? And that the deed to Sam Wyllie's mountain was not secured?"

"I regret to say that is all correct, Mr. Forbes," Appleton said.

"John, we have proof that Wyllie's Mountain contains deposits of gold. I need that mountain!" he shouted and pounded his fist on his desk. "I have a lucrative contract with the U.S. Treasury all lined up."

"I can send more men to Wyllie's farm or go myself, if you prefer," Appleton offered. "I've always wanted to see Kentucky."

"No, Wyllie and my daughter arrived here in Boston yesterday. I didn't want to speak with the man until I had spoken with you first. I need to know if Wyllie knows I sent those men."

Appleton cringed and slumped in his chair.

"Out with it man!" Forbes shouted and stood.

"Dixon and Crowell returned a few months past, hungry and worse for wear."

"Damnation man, why didn't you tell me?" Forbes demanded.

"Because they didn't come to see me until a few days ago. I think they were scared to tell me that they had failed. In fact, they're afraid you'll have them killed because of it."

"I just might," Forbes growled. "Go on."

"They were desperate, penniless, and looking for work," Appleton explained, "so they risked coming to see me."

"What happened in Kentucky?"

"They were reluctant to provide many details at first. Then I took the two to a local tavern to get them a meal. After a few ales, I got them talking freely about it. With every ale, I learned a little more. A sheriff named William Wyllie, the brother of Captain Wyllie, arrested and questioned Dixon. Then the Captain interrogated Dixon himself. When the sheriff of Harrodsburg started building a gallows, Dixon confessed to save his hide. He told them that you had sent the three of them, that you wanted to buy Wyllie Mountain, and that once Dixon had the deed, he was free to kill Captain Wyllie."

"Bloody hell man!" Forbes cursed. "This is worse than I thought it might be."

"Perhaps it's not as bad as you think. Dixon also tried to explain to them that you thought your daughter had been forced to marry Wyllie and that you believed he only married her for her wealth."

"At least Captain Wyllie heard that much. Perhaps he'll think my motive was purely to protect my daughter."

Appleton appeared skeptical. "Dixon said Wyllie is as clever as a fox and as dangerous as a wolf."

"Does Wyllie know there's gold in the mountain?" Forbes asked.

"I don't know. Dixon never mentioned the gold to me. But from what he says of Wyllie, the Captain must be smart enough to realize there had to be a compelling reason for you to want that mountain so badly."

Forbes stared out the window and pondered the state of affairs for a few minutes. He often faced trying situations in business, but this one might be the worst yet. He had to find a way to persuade his daughter that he had her best interests at heart. The survival of their family's power and prosperity were at stake.

But what should he do about Captain Wyllie? There was really only one solution—one that would absolutely solve everything for good. But first he would try offering money. For most men, that was enough to get them to do what he wanted.

He turned around and told Appleton, "Thank you, John. I may have further need of your services. I'll be in touch."

"Yes, Sir. Again, I'm sorry for the news I had to deliver. I know you were hoping for a more positive outcome."

"This isn't over. I'll get what I want in the end."



"But Remington," Alexa told her husband. "I've met the horrible man. I don't think you will be able to get him to agree to an annulment no matter how much you offer him."

"Our daughter has been defrauded by Wyllie. I sought the counsel of my best lawyer, George Abernathy, and he agrees. He believes that he can make the argument that the marriage was invalid, *ab initio*, because it was defective at the time it occurred. She was a grieving widow who was not thinking clearly and left alone in the middle of the wilds. She must have been terrified."

"I'm certain she was. Her mind would have been muddled. That would explain her improper behavior. She may still be befuddled even now. Perhaps that's why she fainted yesterday."

"Abernathy believes the marriage can be annulled because she was mentally incompetent at the time and Mr. Wyllie was committing fraud to acquire her fortune."

"Why not just arrange for a divorce?" Alexa asked.

"Generally it is only granted in the case of adultery. We would have a hard time proving that, even if it has occurred."

"I see."

"Additionally, annulments can be completed in a fourth of the time it takes to obtain a divorce in the courts," he explained.

"Can an annulment be completed quietly?" she asked.

"Abernathy can ensure that the judge is the only one who hears his arguments."

"Good, we must keep this quiet. I've already cautioned all the servants that they face immediate dismissal without wages if they

speak to anyone of seeing Wyllie or his child.”

“Excellent. Do you know where they are staying?”

“Wyllie said the Bell In Hand Inn. But, just to be sure, I had one of your footmen follow their carriage by horseback. I instructed him to wait until he saw them unload their luggage.”

“And?”

“They are in fact staying at the Bell In Hand,” she confirmed, obviously proud of her sleuthing.

“Oh no. Everybody in Boston knows Jimmy.”

“I’m afraid so. When Jimmy Wilson sees Catherine it won’t be long before half the town knows of her arrival.”

“Alexa, you must have a missive taken to Jimmy at once. Tell him to keep Catherine’s return to Boston quiet. That you want to surprise everyone with her arrival by hosting a ball and making the announcement there,” Remington instructed.

“A ball is actually a marvelous idea once she comes around to our way of thinking. And I’ll promise Jimmy that I will personally introduce his wife to all my friends attending the ball,” she added. “*But only if* no one hears of her staying at his inn.”

“Excellent idea.”

“What’s this Wyllie like?” he asked.

“Oh Remington, you should have seen the way he was dressed—in animal skins, like some sort of barbarian. And he carried an enormous knife on his belt and the longest rifle I have ever seen. He had a scar on his chin and roughened hands that looked like a common laborer’s.”

“Well, we knew he was no gentleman. If he was, he would have assisted our daughter with a return to her parents’ home.”

“Did he say anything about his mountain in New Hampshire?”

“No, he only asked about your business interests.”

“What did you tell him?”

“Only that you are a highly successful businessman with many

companies and employees. I didn't say anything about our financial woes."

"Good. I assure you these setbacks are only temporary, my dear.

"What of the child?" she asked.

Forbes rolled his eyes. "That does complicate matters. Did he look healthy? Perhaps he won't survive for long."

"Yes, very. He is a happy healthy babe—but he looks just like that enormous ruffian."

"Perhaps he could be persuaded to take the child back to Kentucky with him. I may have to grease his palm more than I thought."

"I'm telling you Remington," she said, "he won't be bought off."

"Perhaps not, but I will try nevertheless. You never know what a man will do for money."



## CHAPTER 10

Edward sat across from Dora during their carriage ride to Boston.

The road between New Hampshire and Boston was now excellent. New England's first great road building effort, linking coastal towns to inland settlements like Barrington, began in 1790 and over the last ten years the road had improved markedly, allowing for a swift and far more comfortable journey.

They'd talked for several hours and he had learned a great deal about her. The more he learned the more desirable she became. It took little more than a smile from her to have him wanting to behave shamelessly.

He tried making further conversation to quell his desire for her, but the more he listened to her silky voice, the more it made him want to kiss her luscious full lips. Fortunately, Dora became drowsy and napped while he spent the second half of their trip staring out the window as their driver made his way south passing town after town.

Edward needed time to think anyway. Until he met Dora, he'd been trapped in his own memories. Imprisoned by loneliness and guilt. Somehow, with that infallible reasoning of hers, she'd managed to free him. And with that sense of freedom, came a rekindling of old desires—forgotten feelings now remembered. It made him feel alive again. So much so, it now required a constant effort to tamp them down.

It had been even more difficult the night they'd spent at the inn in Crawford Notch. Exhausted from their brush with death, they'd shared a quiet dinner and then retired early. Knowing she was but one door down the hall had almost been more temptation than he could bear.

He'd lain awake most of the night thinking. First, about their unexpected encounter at the graveyard and then about what had happened that day on the mountain—not just that they had both lived, but also their extraordinary kiss. A kiss that made him think that being with Dora just might be his destiny.

Or was their meeting in that cemetery just a peculiar happenstance or some bizarre twist of fate. Why *did* it all happen?

His mind had hounded him most of the night with one question after another. Did they both survive because they were meant to be together? Did a second chance at life also mean a second chance at happiness if they were willing to grasp it?

Gazing out at the passing scenery, he continued to ponder each memory with her. They had left Crawford Notch very early the next morning and briefly visited Mt. Webster. Afterwards, they'd ridden back to Barrington at a leisurely pace and returned to his home for a quick meal. Then he took her to see his store. She'd listened attentively as he explained how he ran his business and marveled at his well-designed displays of merchandise and the wide variety of goods. While eyeing the new spring cloth colors, she declared it was time her mourning period came to an end.

He took her to the town's best dressmaker where she bought a fine satin gown that the shop had on display. While the seamstress made a few quick alternations, she picked out a white lace fan and matching reticule to carry her things.

Then they'd taken a leisurely stroll through town and enjoyed each other's company immensely, laughing and talking about anything and everything from architecture to the flower gardens they passed. He was pleased when she told him of the charitable work she'd done, volunteering at the local hospital and orphanage. But she wanted to do more with her life—to achieve something lasting and significant. She just didn't know exactly what yet.

She also read a great deal, often in her father's library. And she enjoyed writing. She admired Hannah Adams, who lived in the Boston area and made a living as a writer. Dora said she was thinking about writing stories for children or school books. She'd even considered writing a column for a newspaper.

Late in the day, as he walked Dora back to her inn, he invited her to dinner and suggested that she wear her new spring dress. She declined saying she was somewhat sore from her fall and wanted to just eat in her room and rest up for their journey the next day. The magnitude of his disappointment surprised him, but he had tried hard to not show it.

Lying in his own bed that night, he had given free rein to his imagination. He pictured Dora sleeping at Hartwell Inn and wondered

what it would be like to be there with her. Overpowering yearning replaced his loneliness and he ached for the fulfillment of his desire.

Then he thought about Anne. Was he being disloyal? Confused, he had wandered restlessly around his room experiencing a gamut of conflicting emotions. Finally, he decided his feelings for Dora had nothing to do with Anne. He had loved Anne and always would. Nevertheless, he realized he possessed the capacity and desire to love again.

When he finally slept, his dreams were a frustrating haze of emotions. But he woke sure of his sentiments toward Dora. His feelings for her were intensifying.

But such thoughts were unseemly until he made his intentions known to her. It was time he took control of the situation. Never one to procrastinate about anything, he decided to speak candidly before they reached Boston about how he felt.

When Dora awoke, he moved across the carriage and sat next to her. An immediate and intense awareness of her filled the space between them and her closeness made his heart hammer foolishly.

From the flush on her cheeks, he suspected she sensed the same pull between them.

She looked ravishing in her new empire style gown with lace sleeves. Perhaps because she was so tired of black, she'd chosen just the opposite—white—trimmed with tiny pink flowers. Their pink color suddenly reminded him of the bouquet she'd carried to her husband's grave.

Was he pursuing her too soon? His attraction to her had been there from the start. And he thought she felt the same way. Even before they left the cemetery he had sensed something between them. It may have been only a spark, but it was there. He was sure of it. And when they'd kissed on the mountain, the spark of that kiss had set their feelings aflame as surely as burning embers to dry tinder.

He gazed into her upturned face and glimpsed something blossoming in the depths of her eyes. Was it hope? It gave him the courage to plunge forward. "Dora, as a gentleman, I am required to make my intentions known. This comes as a complete shock to me as it may to you. Until I met you, I had no intention of ever desiring a relationship with a woman again. But my feelings have changed over the last four days. I find that I cannot stop thinking about you. I can't

stop desiring to kiss you.” He took her hand in his. “Would you agree to let me court you? I swear propriety will temper my ardor until you are ready for deeper feelings. If you agree, I will speak to your father as soon as we arrive in Boston.”

She smiled excitedly and nodded her approval. “We’ll be arriving late, perhaps speaking to my father should wait until tomorrow.”

A warm glow of happiness flowed through him at her agreement. His heart wanted to sing and his overwhelming need to be closer to her became irresistible. He lowered his lips to hers and wrapped her in his arms. His hand reached for her waist and he tugged her even closer until her full breasts rested against his chest.

She moaned into their kiss. The throaty sound made him dizzy with need and made him want to ravish her body from her hazel eyes to the tips of her petite little feet, but he would not. He would remember his pledge to temper his ardor and he would only kiss her.

Over and over, the rhythmic motion of the carriage pressed their bodies against each other ever so slightly as they continued to kiss. He never wanted the pleasant pulsing to stop. But it had to stop. Just moments ago, he’d promised that decency would temper his desire. He was making a liar out of himself already. He cleared his throat and leaned back.

“No, don’t stop. Kiss me again!” she pleaded.

*To hell with propriety.*

He kissed her moist, soft lips again and again. Deeper and deeper. And with each kiss his craving for her grew more heated.

The driver’s gruff voice called out, “Boston just ahead, Mr. Wyllie.”

Edward wanted to throttle the man.

Reluctantly, he released her lips. Her kisses left his own lips throbbing and warm. Dora was obviously a passionate woman. So many young women, particularly of the upper sort, seemed incapable of allowing their blood to grow hot. Their only concern was protecting their virtue. They frequently took that understandable duty too seriously, cringing at a flirtatious glance or a mere touch of their hand. When they finally did marry, they were often ill-prepared to be amorous toward their husbands.

“I believe we are arriving just in time,” he said, embarrassed by his uncomfortably tight breeches. He stood, relocated to the other side of the carriage, and crossed his long legs.

“Or perhaps we are arriving too soon,” she replied, gazing at him seductively. Then her eyes widened as she realized what she said. “Oh, forgive me! I should not have said that.”

There was no doubt Dora was definitely a passionate woman. If anything, her behavior might even be called brazen. He’d finally discovered a flaw in this perfect woman. But it was a flaw he could force himself to live with. He grinned at the thought.

Her fingers flew to cover her mouth. “What has come over me? I mean, oh, please do not think ill of me. I’m not myself. I’ve never acted this way before.” Her face flushed scarlet as she straightened her gown.

“Do not concern yourself. It is entirely my fault. It’s just that you are so beautiful.”

She smiled at the compliment and her shapely chest rose and fell rapidly. He would give much to be able to caress the treasures that lay hidden beneath that beautiful gown’s bodice.

“I’ve instructed the driver to take us to the Bell In Hand Inn first so you can meet Sam and Catherine,” he told her. “If that’s all right with you.”

“Of course. Perhaps we could all have dinner together.”

“They have their new baby with them, so we shall have to see. But I’ll suggest dinner.”

“I would like that,” she said.

A cacophony of sounds generated by the bustling city and port soon reached them. After a few minutes, Edward glanced out the window to check their location. “We’re heading south on Congress Street,” he told her. “How far is the inn from here?”

Dora peered out as well. “Not far at all. The driver will go left on Hanover and then right on Union Street.”

“Have you ever met Catherine?” she asked.

“No, Sam met her on their journey to Kentucky. Actually, she’s

from Boston and was journeying to Kentucky with her husband to inspect his large land holdings there. But before the two could reach Kentucky, she was widowed. She joined Sam and the others for protection. After they reached Kentucky, they fell in love and married. I never thought Sam would marry. It came as a complete surprise to me.”

“Why?”

“The Revolution changed Sam. Like so many soldiers, war scarred both his body and his mind. The horrific battles he fought forced him to become a fierce warrior and he couldn’t stop being one. His heart seemed cold and his mind distant. He longed for adventure and a chance to prove himself again. Going to Kentucky was a chance to grasp that.”

“But Catherine was able to warm his heart?”

“It would seem so. He sounds happier than ever in his letters. She must be some woman. I’m anxious to meet her.”

“You said she was from Boston. Did he mention her married name in one of his letters?”

“Adams, I believe,” he answered. “Catherine Adams.”

“I know her!” Dora exclaimed with a lively smile. “She was Catherine Forbes before she married. We were friends. I’ve been to her home many times for balls. I even went to her wedding.” Her face grew serious again. “How unfortunate that Mr. Adams died on their journey. Do you know how he died?”

“He was murdered by thieves. William and Stephen later killed the pair when...well, that’s another long story.”



Dora stepped into the Bell In Hand and Edward followed, carrying their bags inside. The fragrance of Jimmy’s famous meat pies assailed her. Her stomach growled in response. More than anything though, she was thirsty after the long carriage ride and only a few sips of stale water all day. The sight of mugs filled to the brim with the inn’s popular ale made her mouth water.

Edward took her arm and guided her to the inn’s reception area.

He greeted the clerk and arranged for a room for him and asked the man to store her bags until after they had dinner. Then he inquired as to whether Sam Wyllie was a guest at the inn.

“Indeed, Sir, he and his lovely family have been here three days,” the man said. “They are staying in our nicest room on the second floor, down the hall from the room I just gave you. Shall I send a message up to him?”

“Absolutely,” Edward replied. “May I make use of your quill and ink?”

The man slid a piece of parchment toward Edward as well as the writing implements. He considered what to say for a moment or two as Dora looked on.

*“Welcome back to civilization big brother. I’m ready to hear your tall tales of killing bears and wrestling wolves in the wilds of Kentucky.”*

*I’ve brought a surprise. Care to join us for dinner?”*

Edward blew on the ink to dry it, folded the note, and handed it back to the clerk. “We will wait in the eatery,” he told the man.

“I’ll have your note taken up right away,” the clerk promised.

He gave the clerk a coin and guided Dora back to the dining room.

She glanced up at Edward. “You’ll hear lively conversations here between journalists, lawyers, and professors. They’ve made the Bell In Hand their unofficial headquarters. Merchants, politicians, and students are also frequent patrons. And here comes the owner, Mr. Wilson.”

“A table for four please, Sir,” Edward told the corpulent proprietor when he strode up.

“Welcome back to the Bell In Hand, Mrs. Williams,” Jimmy told her, taking her elbow. “Let me guide you to one of my best tables.”

“Thank you, Jimmy,” she said. “This is my friend, Edward Wyllie of Barrington, New Hampshire.”

“Are you related to Captain Sam Wyllie?” Jimmy asked.

“He’s my big brother,” Edward replied proudly. “I haven’t seen him in three years.”

“He is indeed a *big* brother. Delighted to meet you, Mr. Wyllie,” Jimmy told him. “If you need anything at all, please let me know. I’m older than dirt, but I can still take good care of my customers.”

“I can certainly testify to that,” Dora agreed with a smile at Jimmy.

As they took their seats, she noticed that Edward seemed a bit on edge. “Are you worried? Or just excited about seeing Sam again?”

“I’m fine. Just a bit uneasy. I should have told Sam about losing my family before now. It will come as a great shock to him. And it won’t be easy for me to tell him either.”

“You’ll find the words,” she told him.

He took her hand and ran his thumb across the top of her hand. “I’m glad you’re here with me.”

The gentle caress sent shivers up her arm and down her back. She couldn’t believe she was reacting so strongly to the simple touch of his hand, but he was so stunningly handsome. No, it was more than just his looks. He gallantly scared off her uncles and saved her life on the mountain. And he was exceedingly charming. His caring ways touched her deeply. Was it possible to care so strongly for a person in such a short time? Could he be the soulmate she had always longed for? She gazed into his eyes, wishing they were alone again in the mountains, not in a crowded noisy tavern in the heart of Boston.



## CHAPTER 11

Sam searched the large bustling dining room for his brother. When he spotted Edward, he couldn't believe his eyes. He sat at a table holding the hands of strange woman. How could he betray his wife like this? It was unspeakable. "Wait here," he barked at Catherine.

Sam marched toward Edward's table. The woman his brother sat with was beautiful. There was no denying that. But so was his wife Anne. What was his brother thinking? Their parents raised them to be men of principle with solid Christian morals. Edward had always been a loyal family man. Was he capable of this kind of betrayal?

When he reached their table he came up behind his brother and then faced him, eyes narrowed. "What in heaven's name are you doing here holding this woman's hands?"

"Sam!" Edward stood and reached out to hug him.

Sam ignored his brother's outstretched hands for the moment and continued to glare into Edward's eyes, hoping there was some explanation for his outrageous behavior.

"Sam, it's not what you think. Please sit down. Where's Catherine?"

"If it is not what I think, I will give you but one chance to explain."



Dora stared slack-jawed. The enormous man, clad in buckskins and looking fiercer than any native she'd ever seen, towered over every man in the room, including Edward. And Edward was taller than everyone but Sam. A knife longer than her forearm hung on his leather belt. She suspected this man could survive most any menace unscathed.

Like Edward, Sam was exceptionally handsome, and the two shared similar coloring and features. But the man's scowl was enough to make her want to curl up in a tight ball and hide. And his angry deep voice and narrowed eyes would make a Hessian soldier quake.

But Edward just let out a deep sigh.

"Bloody hell," Sam swore, "I will not stand for infidelity right under my nose. How could you bring her here?"

"Because my entire family died a year ago."

Sam's eyes grew wide and then softened. His face filled with emotions and he chewed on his lower lip for a second before fiercely hugging Edward. "Damn it man, why didn't you write and let all of us know?"

They stood facing each other, caught in the pain of the moment. Edward told him in a slight but firm voice, "I couldn't bear to put it down on paper. I was so filled with guilt." He glanced down at her. "Until this wonderful woman helped me to realize it wasn't my fault."

"Let me get Catherine and my son, and you can introduce us," Sam said. He spun around and in long hurried strides reached his wife and babe. He took the child in his arms and spoke briefly to Catherine.

Edward turned his attention back to her. "He's right, I should have told him. I just never found the will to write. Or maybe I lacked the courage."

She could tell he was disappointed with himself.

As Sam approached with Catherine and their babe, Dora saw that her friend was even more attractive than she was before she left Boston for Kentucky. Marriage, or rather love, certainly agreed with her. She still looked positively regal—not surprising with her noble English blood—but she also appeared physically stronger and more self-assured. Classically beautiful, she had high cheekbones and a strong jaw. Gleaming black hair framed her pale face and striking dark blue eyes.

When Catherine caught sight of her, a gracious smile lit her friend's face and she stretched out her arms and embraced her. "Dora! I can't believe it's you. What a delightful surprise. I've missed you and our other friends so much since I left Boston."

Dora gave her a warm hug back. "When Edward told me who

Sam's wife was, and I realized it was you, I couldn't wait to see you again. I am so sorry for the loss of your husband."

"The Lord worked it all for good. I found Sam and true happiness," she said, gazing lovingly up at Sam. "And we had Rory just five months ago."

Dora drew the blanket away from the babe's face so she could see him better. A smiling toothless, and quite stout looking, boy smiled up at her. "He's such a handsome fellow, just like his father and uncle!"

Rory cooed at her and Dora couldn't help but giggle when Catherine said, "He already likes pretty women."

"Sam, this pretty woman is Mrs. Williams of Boston. She was widowed last year."

"I hope you will excuse my earlier outburst. I'm actually delighted to meet you, Mrs. Williams."

"Please, call me Dora."

"Speaking of pretty women," Edward said, "it is a pleasure to finally meet you, Catherine."

"I know Sam's other brothers well," Catherine told him, "and I look forward to getting to know you better."

"Please, have a seat," Edward suggested. "We have much to discuss while we eat our dinner." He ordered ale and a meat pie for all of them and a basket of oysters.

"First, tell us of your family's loss, brother," Sam said. "What happened?"

Edward swallowed, grief shadowing his eyes. "Yellow fever. Last spring. They went to Anne's parents' house to swim and picnic for a few days. Then they all grew ill and died there within hours of each other."

"Good God man. I'm so sorry," Sam said. "No wonder you couldn't find the will to write about it."

Edward looked down. "It wasn't just losing them that made it so difficult. It was that I thought that if I had agreed to go to Kentucky with all of you, they would still be alive. Instead, I chose my lucrative business and its promise of wealth." He clenched his fist as he

continued. "Stephen was right. Staying in New Hampshire did not keep my family safe. If we'd gone to Kentucky with all of you and Bear, my precious family might all be alive now."

The irony of it brought bitter bile to Dora's mouth.

Edward gazed up at Sam. "I'm sorry I never found the courage to write to you. That was unfair of me. You should have known what happened. But every time I tried to pen a missive, I couldn't make the quill move. On top of soul crushing guilt, I thought God was punishing me for not having the faith that my brothers did. And I knew you thought I just didn't have the courage to face the wilderness."

"Edward..." Sam started.

"No, you were right, Sam. I didn't have enough courage. When Stephen proposed the idea of moving to Kentucky, I was afraid my family would meet the same horrible fate as Daniel Boone's son and brother—tortured and decapitated. The thought terrified me. My faint-heartedness at the time is something I will always be ashamed of."

That compelled Dora to speak up. "Edward, that wasn't cowardice. That was genuine and legitimate concern for your family's safety."

"Dora's right. The wilderness can be daunting and formidable," Sam said. "Even for those of us who are accustomed to it. And used to fighting men or beast. You weren't. There's no shame in admitting that. You were at first a scholar and then a businessman. You knew that was the realm where you belonged."

"Edward, you told Sam that Dora has helped you. How did she help?" Catherine asked.

"She made me see reason—that Yellow Fever struck all over these colonies—that I bore no guilt for their deaths."

"And she was right," Sam said.

"That still doesn't negate the fact that if we had left with you, they might all still be alive," Edward argued.

"Perhaps," Sam said. He looked down and then shook his head slightly. "Ironically, you were right about the dangers of the journey and the wilderness. As you know, our family has suffered terrible losses."

Everyone remained quiet for a moment while the waiter served their food.

When the man left, Sam raised his head and spoke again. "They were grievous losses, but Stephen was right too. Kentucky is a second paradise and the west is filled with so much potential for our country's people it will take generations to realize it all."

"Indeed," Catherine agreed. "Kentucky is rich in both beauty and opportunity."

"Undoubtedly, many who travel west will suffer their own great sacrifices in search of better futures, Edward said. "But I've learned that those who remain behind may suffer loss as well."

"Your wife and children will always be remembered fondly in our hearts, Edward," Sam said, "but it is time to move forward with your life. I'm glad to see that your heart is healing. Let's celebrate our reunion." He raised his mug in salute and they all did as well. Then they ate in silence for a few minutes.

"How are Stephen, Jane, William, and Bear?" Edward asked. "Is Bear still looking out for all of you?"

"Indeed our big Scot brother will always do that, but now he's also looking out for Artis, his new wife. They were married last fall. She's a spirited lass also from Scotland. Little John is staying with them while we're away."

"And William?" Edward asked. "You wrote that he married a young woman named Kelly that he helped on your journey west."

"Yes, and they now have a loveable and pretty little girl," Catherine said.

"And what's more, he's now sheriff of Boonesborough," Sam added, sounding proud of their brother.

"And Stephen and Jane. Have they recovered from their loss?" Edward asked.

"I believe they will always bear that cross, but they are thriving and so is his cattle business. He has several contracts with local forts to supply their beef. Martha and Polly are growing into beautiful young girls and little Samuel is Stephen's pride and joy. When we left, Jane was with child again," Sam explained. "Now tell me what have you learned about our mountain?"

“Dora went with me to meet with the surveyor and geologist. She owns Mount Webster and wanted to see it,” Edward said, and then took a bite of his meat pie.

Sam turned to address her. “That’s just across Crawford Notch.”

“Yes. It was my late husband’s. He inherited it and when he passed, he willed it to me.”

Catherine placed a hand on her arm. “I’m so sorry for your loss.”

“A fever claimed my husband last November,” she explained. “I was visiting his grave in Barrington when I met Edward. She told Catherine and Sam about her husband’s maternal link to Barrington and then about his two bumbling uncle’s efforts to scare her. “Edward took care of them in short order.”

“Glad to hear it,” Sam said.

She smiled at Edward, letting her gratitude show.

Edward continued. “So, as you requested in your letter, I hired a geologist and a surveyor and after they’d been there a week, we rode up there and met with them.”

“What did they find?” Catherine asked, her voice filled with excitement.

“Sam, there’s gold in your mountain—lots of it,” Edward declared.

Sam’s eyes widened just a fraction. Like Edward, his reaction was subdued. But she suspected it was because Sam was the type of man who placed little value on material things.

“That explains why Forbes wanted it so badly,” Sam said, “and why the men he sent to see me in Kentucky took such desperate and vile measures trying to get it.”

Incredulous, Dora turned to Catherine. “Your father’s men did that?”

“Yes,” Catherine said, handing Rory a piece of bread crust to chew on. She told Dora and Edward the entire story. “So, I believe he has been investigating mining operations in New Hampshire for some time. In researching landowners there, he came across Sam’s name, as the owner of Wyllie Mountain, and realized he was the same man I

married. The same man he believed had forced me to move to Kentucky. He must have decided he could kill two birds with one stone—get the deed to Wyllie Mountain and then have Sam killed so I would have no reason to remain in Kentucky. Clearly he wants me to return to Boston.”

“I knew your father was an ambitious man,” she told Catherine. “He owns or has interest in half of Boston. But he must be mad to do something like that to his own daughter’s family.”

Catherine’s face grew sad. “Maybe he is a little mad. But he thought then, and still believes, that Sam married me for my wealth.”

Like most everyone else in Boston’s gentry, Dora was aware that Catherine had inherited a sizeable fortune and an English estate from her maternal grandfather. It was rumored that was the reason Adams had married her.

Sam frowned. “And Catherine’s dear mother thinks me an uncouth barbarian who forced Catherine to marry me. Catherine tried reasoning with the woman but there was no convincing her.”

“Well,” Edward began with a grin, “she may be right about the uncouth part.”

Sam swatted Edward’s arm playfully. “Just because I don’t dress like a dandy like you, my fancy brother, doesn’t make me uncouth.”

“No, but you will have to admit you’re a lot more comfortable in the wild than in the midst of civilization,” Edward pointed out.

Sam glanced around the crowded room. The clamor had reached a deafening level. “Truthfully, I can’t wait to get back to our horse farm in Kentucky. Horses make a lot less noise than people.”

“Sam,” Catherine said. “We’ve waited for my father for three days and he’s made no effort to see us. Perhaps we should go to New Hampshire to see the mountain ourselves. You and Edward could make plans to establish a mining company.”

“Hold on a minute,” Edward told her. “I helped Sam with hiring a geologist and surveyor, but we have never discussed going into business together. I already have a thriving business to take care of. Besides, the mountain is Sam’s not mine.”

“The land will remain mine—it’s sentimental to me,” Sam said. “But the profits from the gold the mine produces will be shared by all

of my brothers. You, William, Stephen, and Bear too.”

Edward’s brow furrowed as he considered what Sam offered.

“Furthermore, I would welcome you as a partner in the mine’s operation,” Sam added. “You know far more than I could ever hope to about running a business.”

“But I don’t know the first thing about mining—except that mountains are dangerous places,” Edward said with a quick look and a wink at Dora.

“We can hire a mine operator,” Catherine suggested.

“And if they find gold on Mount Webster, perhaps I could be a partner too,” Dora added.

“Dora’s mourning period has ended. I plan to speak to her father tomorrow morning to seek permission to court her,” Edward told Sam and Catherine.

“Mr. Tudor is a well-respected lawyer and an exceptionally smart man,” Catherine told Edward. “I’m sure he will readily agree.”

“Edward is obviously a smart man as well,” Sam said, with a glance and a smile at Dora.

In that moment, Dora grew quite fond of Edward’s oldest brother.

“By the way Sam,” Edward said, “I need to thank you for teaching me how to tie a decent knot in a rope.” Edward started to explain, but stopped when they all heard Catherine gasp.



## CHAPTER 12

Catherine's stomach clenched when she glanced across the room. Her father and his lawyer were striding swiftly toward their table. She glanced at Sam who had followed her gaze.

"Your father?" Sam asked.

"Yes, and his lawyer," Catherine answered. "I can't believe he finally came."

Edward and Dora both looked toward the two approaching men as well.

Sam rose to his full height and pulled his shoulders back. "This could prove interesting."

Edward shot up and positioned himself next to Sam.

Catherine stood as well and handed Rory to Dora. "Take care of him, please."

"Of course," Dora agreed.

As her dignified wig-wearing father approached, he appeared just as robust as he always had. As usual, his complexion was ruddy, but she noticed a few gray hairs poking out from under the wig. If she recalled correctly, he was about fifty this year, only about ten years older than Sam.

As he neared, she lifted her chin and met his icy gaze straight on.

Her father only nodded toward her and said, "Catherine. Nice to see you again." Then he turned to face Sam. "Catherine, introduce us."

Sam's eyes narrowed. "I can introduce myself. I'm Captain Sam Wyllie of Kentucky. This is my brother Edward Wyllie of Barrington, New Hampshire and his friend Mrs. Williams, of Boston."

"I know who she is," Forbes barked. "Hello, Mrs. Williams. I was

sorry to hear of the loss of your husband.”

“Thank you, Mr. Forbes,” Dora replied.

“Do you always bring your lawyer to family reunions?” Sam asked.

“George Abernathy is also my friend and advisor,” Forbes said. “I believe he will be helpful in resolving this matter for all concerned. It appears you have finished your dinner, will you kindly follow us to his office? It is but a short distance from here.”

“We have finished, but no,” Sam replied, crossing his arms. “If you wish to speak with me in a private setting, you can follow me upstairs to our room.”

Catherine’s eyes widened. She couldn’t believe Sam offered their room as a meeting place. But there were no other convenient options and she suspected Sam wanted her father on his turf.

“If you insist,” Forbes retorted. “Catherine follow me.”

“She’s done taking orders from you,” Sam told him. “She takes orders from no one now. You can *ask* her if you’d like.”

Her father’s face grew red and he pursed his lips but said nothing. He and Abernathy both stared at Catherine waiting for her to comply.

“Catherine, you will respect and obey me.”

Her father’s stern glare made a slight chill run through her, but she met his eyes without flinching. “I love you, father. But I won’t obey you.”

“Respect is more important than love,” he declared.

She tightened her hands into fists and then loosened them. She had no intention of permitting herself to be intimidated by the man ever again. But she knew Sam wouldn’t put up with her father’s boorishness much longer. She needed to diffuse this situation before the two men came to blows right here in the middle of the inn’s dining room.

“Father, I want you to meet your grandson, Rory,” Catherine said, placing her palm on Rory’s head. She struggled to convey an even, conciliatory tone in her voice. “He’s five months old now.”

Her father took one cursory glance at Rory, inhaled deeply, and let out a long breath, abandoning all pretense of civility. "Come along Wyllie. Show me where your room is," he said and stood there waiting.

"God in heaven, you are a cruel bastard!" Edward hissed.

She fought hard to control the tears that threatened to fall. Not because she was afraid of her father, but because of his indifference toward her son. And, it reminded her of her own treatment by the man.

Sam regarded her with concern. "Catherine, I suggest that you wait here and visit with Dora. Edward will come with me."

"If you think that's for the best," she told Sam.

"I do. Edward and I will rejoin you as soon as we can. This shouldn't take long," Sam said, with an air of calm and confidence. Then he kissed her softly on the lips and squeezed her shoulder.

His reassuring touch helped to calm her quivering nerves.

Sam turned to leave and her father and Abernathy followed him. Edward placed a hand on his pistol and then followed all three. It appeared she wasn't the only one who didn't trust her father.



Edward could not believe what he'd just witnessed. How could the man ignore his own grandson? A child so precious, so faultless, and as beautiful as that little babe?

As the four of them trudged up the stairs, he prayed Forbes would not push Sam too far. No man did.

Sam unlocked the door to their suite and motioned for Forbes and Abernathy to enter. The two men sat down in two of the three chairs. Edward took the third chair. Sam remained standing by the hearth, smoldering like the hot coals within it.

"Mr. Wyllie," Abernathy began, "we will get right to the point. We plan to file for a motion to annul your marriage to Mrs. Adams."

"Her name is Catherine Wyllie," Sam said.

Abernathy continued. "Mr. Forbes is prepared to offer you a considerable sum, a fortune really, if you agree to sign the Motion of Annulment and leave with your son."

"As soon as possible," Forbes added with a sneer.

Edward couldn't help but smile to himself as he waited for Sam's response.

For a moment, Sam just stared at Forbes. It was so quiet Edward could hear a fly buzzing on the window pane.

Forbes looked away, apparently unable to withstand Sam's penetrating eyes.

But Sam would not be ignored. Like an approaching storm, his brother eased closer to Forbes. He hardened his eyes and gave the man a black look.

Edward had seen that scowl before. It was a warning. A warning the man should take very seriously.

"I love your daughter, Mr. Forbes," Sam said. Intensity and force filled his voice. "I think I loved her from the first moment I caught sight of her. She appeared so brave and strong even though she was all alone and had just been widowed. On my honor, I swear I knew naught of her fortune until after we were married. On our honeymoon at Cumberland Falls, she told me of her wealth for the first time. I did not marry her for her wealth, her position, or her inheritance. I couldn't have because I knew nothing of it. I care nothing for those things anyway. I married her for her strength, her kindness, her unfailing love. And I will love her endlessly and always."

"Sentimental hogwash," Forbes spit out.

Sam was undeterred. "I love your daughter beyond any measure or any treasure. *She* is my fortune, Mr. Forbes. The only one I ever want. I love her more than any payoff you could ever propose. I decline your offer. I will *not* be bought off!"

"You should hear my offer first," Forbes insisted.

Sam clenched his fists at his sides. "Out of respect for Catherine, I will not give you the beating you deserve for insulting my honor."

"At least not yet," Edward chimed in.

Forbes and Abernathy glared at Edward and he just smiled back.

Sam continued addressing Forbes. "I suggest you take your lawyer and your insulting offer and leave at once. I gave you a chance to meet your grandson and share our joy. You just threw that in Catherine's face with thoughtless inelegance. And your discourteous wife did the same. It was the coldest homecoming imaginable."

"My wife is only concerned for Catherine's well-being. As am I," Forbes said.

"Mr. Wyllie, your marriage will be annulled," Abernathy insisted. "The sooner you accept that the better. With her husband recently murdered, at the time Catherine was incapable of making a decision of that magnitude. In her vulnerable state of mind, she would have been unable to think clearly. If she were thinking clearly, her conduct would have reflected her genteel breeding. She would have done the rational and proper thing and returned to her home and family. Therefore the marriage is invalid, ab initio, because it was defective at the time it occurred."

"You bloody maggot pie!" Sam swore. "Everything you just said is a lie!"

"Any judge in the city will agree with me. And I assure you, Mr. Forbes *knows* them all quite well," Abernathy added, raising his brows.

Edward cringed at Abernathy's implication. If the judges were all in Forbes' pocket perhaps the cruel bastard could actually do it.

"We will just leave," Sam said. "And you will never see your daughter again."

"If you try to leave, I will have the judge order the sheriff and the militia to forcibly detain you," Forbes threatened.

"You can try," Sam swore.

Edward stood. "Mr. Forbes. Apparently, you do not know my brother well. First, you should count yourself fortunate that he has not already run you through with that blade of his for insulting him so rashly. Second, he is a war hero of considerable renown, decorated by our recently passed, but forever esteemed, President George Washington himself. Third, we are from a highly educated and well respected family and we are quite capable of hiring our own lawyers

to befuddle this simpleton.” He indicated the arrogant prick with a sweep of his hand toward Abernathy.

Abernathy harrumphed, expressing his dissatisfaction with Edward’s characterization.

Forbes stood and faced Sam. “I will have Catherine back in my home one way or another. The sooner you realize that the *easier* it will be for all concerned.”

“I don’t care about easy. We are men of honor,” Sam avowed, “who will not be bullied *or* bribed. The sooner you realize *that* the better.”

“We have nothing further to discuss,” Edward told them.

“Oh yes we do,” Forbes insisted. “Let’s discuss my generous offer.”

Done talking, Sam unsheathed his knife. The blade, reflecting the hearth’s flames, matched his fiery expression as he said, “I have nothing further to *say* to you.”

## CHAPTER 13

“You do have a knack for getting your point across,” Edward said after he shut the door behind Forbes and Abernathy.

Sam sheathed his knife. “I think they got the message.”

“Yes, I’ve never seen two men depart that fast. Shall we rejoin the ladies downstairs?”

“Before we do, do you think they have legal grounds to do what they threatened?” Sam asked.

“Sam, we need a lawyer to answer that. And I know just the man.”

“Who?”

“Dora’s father, Douglas Tudor. He’s a well-respected lawyer. He studied law in the office of John Adams and he has a successful practice here in Boston.”

“John Adams was a relative, cousin I believe, of Catherine’s late husband.”

“I think we should engage Tudor at once,” Edward said.

“When do you plan to get his approval to court Dora?”

“Tomorrow morning.”

“Good. If you have no objection, will you speak to the man about this matter as well? If he agrees to represent us, Catherine and I will meet with him as soon as it is convenient for him.”

“Of course,” Edward agreed.

“I was surprised Forbes didn’t bring up the mountain,” Sam said.

“I was surprised you didn’t bring up the threats his men made to your family and his directive to have you killed.”

"I want to save that. In case we need it to make a case against Forbes," Sam said.

"That might be wise. Tell me, what do you think of Dora?"

"She's lovely. Is she still mourning? Did she love her husband?"

"It was an arranged marriage. I have a feeling that she did her duty, as so many young women of the upper sort are forced to do, and she married the man but she wasn't that close to him. They were only married a few months."

"How do you feel toward her?"

"After my family died, I never thought I could feel alive again. Much less love again. But she has changed all that," he said, with a tinge of wonder in his heart. "We've only known each other a few days, but they've been some of the best days of my life."

"I don't think it matters how long you've known someone. If it's right, you know it."

"I think somehow, we were meant to meet when we did. I took one look into her eyes and there was no turning back."

"I'm happy for you, Edward," Sam said. "Catherine did much the same for me. She brought me back to life. Before I met her, I was cold on the inside. I refused to love any woman. Even her for a while. My heart fought against love."

"And now?"

"Now she truly is my treasure. And so is my son."

"She's beautiful Sam. One of the most striking women I've ever seen."

"She is, isn't she?"

"Yes. She also has a natural elegance and an air of grace."

"It must be her noble blood. She's descended from English nobility."

"It shows," Edward said.

"I can scarcely believe that Forbes is her father. There's nothing honorable about him. I don't care how influential and successful the



man is.”

Edward nodded. “His treatment of Catherine and Rory was shocking and reprehensible.”

“I won’t let him hurt her!” Sam swore.

“We won’t let him hurt any of you,” Edward vowed.

Sam shook his head and let out a long sigh. “I should never have brought her here.”

“Don’t worry. Forbes may be wealthy and powerful. But he’s no match for you.”



Sadness marred Catherine’s stunning face as they watched her father and his lawyer rush out of the inn without speaking.

Catherine cuddled her beautiful sleeping son against her chest as she struggled to control her emotions.

His rudeness, in Dora’s mind, was inexcusable. How could a father treat his only daughter that way? Her own loving father would find Forbes’ actions disgraceful.

“They’re obviously done speaking,” Catherine said. “I pray Sam was able to bring my father around.” She placed a kiss on the babe’s head. “I would so like for him and mother to accept and love our son.”

Dora thought there was little chance of that. The man’s heart seemed to be made of granite. “Sam and Edward will be down soon and we’ll know what happened.”

“I fear my father plans to make trouble for us. I don’t know how, but he always finds a way to get what he wants.”

After a few uncomfortable minutes, Dora pointed and said, “Look, there’s Sam and Edward coming down the stairs.” She watched the two men approach and could tell from the scowls on their faces that Catherine’s fear would prove true.

When Sam took his seat, Catherine told him, “Sam, please tell me what happened.”

He remained silent for a moment, peering intently at Catherine. Then Sam moved his head closer to his wife and in a lowered voice he answered her. "Your father wants to have our marriage annulled."

Catherine's face grew taut with anger. "But that's preposterous. We've been married for more than two years and we've had a child!"

"His attorney has come up with some outlandish legal technicality that says at the time you were not competent to make a decision about marriage," Sam explained.

"What!" Catherine exclaimed.

Edward clarified, also keeping his voice low. "They are contending that your husband's brutal murder would have been so upsetting to you that you were incapable of making a decision of that magnitude. Therefore, he is going to make a case that your marriage is invalid."

"But that will never hold up in a court of law," Catherine protested.

"It seems your father has more than a little influence on the local judges," Sam said. "But don't worry Catherine, we will not let him push this ridiculous farce that far."

"You need to engage my father to help you," Dora proposed. "I know he would help."

"That's exactly what I advised," Edward said. "Sam suggested that I ask him tomorrow—right after I get his permission to court you."

Dora decided to ask the question that had needled her ever since their carriage ride here. "What if he says no when you declare your intentions to court me?" she asked. "He might want more time to get to know you."

"He won't," Sam stated matter of factly.

"He has no reason to," Edward told her lightheartedly. "I'm well educated, successful, and wealthy."

"Don't forget handsome and gallant," she told him with a wink.

She smiled and turned her attention back to Catherine. But her friend sat huddled in her chair with her head lowered. Dora glanced at

Sam and then Edward who were both watching Catherine with worried looks on their faces.

After a long tense silence, she spoke to Catherine in a gentle voice. "Here, give Rory to me. Your arms must be getting tired." She reached out for the babe and Catherine handed him to her. Fortunately, Rory did not wake.

Catherine continued to gaze into her lap as she kneaded her hands together. When she finally glanced up, the color and life had drained from her face. The sparkle in her eyes was now due solely to her unshed tears.



Sam knew old fears and uncertainties plagued Catherine's mind. She was feeling weak and vulnerable in the face of her father's threats. The horrible man was as intimidating as Julius Caesar must have been and just as ambitious. But Sam believed Catherine would never allow herself to be conquered again. Not after she'd made such great strides toward her independence and self-confidence, taking her destiny in her own hands and building a new life in Kentucky. A life of happiness and love.

But he was furious that her father was putting her through this. And he was angry with himself for suggesting that they come to Boston. He should have listened to her. She'd told him what kind of man her father was. He swallowed hard, trying not to reveal his ire.

He reached for her hand and clutched it in his. "Catherine, if you have ever trusted me, you must trust me on this. We will not let him take control of your life again."

She glanced up at him. "I do trust you Sam. I just don't trust him. He demands respect and obedience from us—not love."

"What do you say we get a good night's sleep, and then start the process of resolving this matter tomorrow," Edward suggested. He turned to Dora. "I'll escort you home and then come back here. In the morning, I'll go to your father's office first thing and then pick you up as soon as I finish speaking with him."

"That will be fine, Edward." Dora turned to Catherine. "My father rarely loses his cases. He's won cases arising from shipping, commerce, agriculture, the use of land, the iron industry, trade, death,

and taxes. Edward's right. This *will* be resolved in your favor." She straightened Rory's blanket.

Sam was grateful for Dora's words of reassurance and her help with Rory. He would be even more grateful for her father's help with Forbes and his conniving lying lawyer.

The concern on Catherine's face seemed to abate somewhat, only to be replaced by cold contempt as she said, "I want to believe all of you, but I know my father. Don't underestimate him."

## CHAPTER 14

The next morning, Dora awoke with her heart as bright as the sunbeams penetrating her bedroom windows. She wanted something cheerful and jaunty to wear today and asked her maid to spruce up her favorite yellow gown since she hadn't worn it in months. After she'd bathed and Marie helped her dress, she gazed into her full-length mirror, admiring the pretty frock, glad to be rid of her black mourning clothing. She spun around and sat down to let Marie fix her freshly washed hair.

"Please donate all my black gowns to the poor," she instructed the maid. "No more gloomy attire for me."

"Then you're done mourning, Mrs. Williams?" Marie asked. "Is that why you bought that pretty white gown in Barrington?"

"It is! I'll miss my late husband. Like I would miss a good friend who had passed. But I am no longer grieving his loss. My trip to Barrington changed my life." It *had* changed her. She would no longer take her life for granted. And she would seize every opportunity to become the woman she was meant to be.

"You look as lovely and fresh as a yellow rose on a summer morning, Mrs. Williams," Marie said when she'd finished. "It's nice to see a smile on your pretty face and some life in your step for a change."

"It's wonderful to smile again," Dora told her. She opened her wardrobe and retrieved a matching fashionable straw hat with a shallow crown and a wide brim trimmed with a yellow ribbon. Feeling giddy, she hurried downstairs to the parlor to await Edward's arrival.

She was certain her father would grant his approval, but couldn't wait for Edward to arrive. While she waited, she read *Lyrical Ballads, with a Few Other Poems*, by Wordsworth and Coleridge. But she soon set it aside, too excited to concentrate.

When Edward did finally arrive, looking dapper as usual, he

quickly told her that her father would not grant his approval until he spoke privately to her first. So, holding hands in the back of his carriage, they hurried back to her father's office. Edward waited for her in the outer office of the law clerk.

The clerk ushered her into the light-filled room and shut the door behind her.

"Good morning, Father." After giving him a kiss on the cheek and squeezing his hand, she sat down in a leather chair in her father's well-appointed office that held the scent of his sweet-smelling pipe tobacco and his open bottle of ink.

When she was born, her father was in his late thirties and she noted that his age was beginning to show. But, as always, she heard an inherent strength in his voice. His features were strong yet kind. Today, he wore one of his nicest dark blue frock coats, trimmed with gold buttons down the front lapels, and his favorite wool tweed waistcoat. His freshly laundered shirt and cravat framed his still handsome face.

He sat down across from her and peered intently into her eyes. He always did that when he wanted to gauge whether a person was telling the truth. "Mr. Wyllie seeks my permission to court you. You're certain this is what you want, Dora?"

"Yes, father. I've never been more certain of anything. I respected your wishes for my first marriage. It wasn't horrible, but I wasn't happy either. I don't know for certain yet that Edward is the man I will marry. But when I do marry again, I want it to be for love."

"Arranging that marriage is one of the great regrets of my life. I shouldn't have yielded to your mother's wishes. She wanted the best for you and so did I. She thought marrying Mr. Williams would provide a secure future for you."

"It was secure. And dull. But I want more out of life. Much more."

"I can't blame you for that. You believe this young man will make you happy?"

"I do. He already has."

"But you've only known him a few days," he protested. "He said you met five days ago."

"True, but it didn't take me long to recognize his many fine

qualities. I knew at once that our souls were perfectly matched. We've both lost a spouse. We understand one another. I admire his intelligence. I'm drawn to him so strongly. I never felt this way about any other man."

"That's an especially good sign," he said kindly, with a touch of humor around his mouth and a twinkling in his blue eyes.

"And he's so handsome. And kind. And gallant. And courageous." She started to tell him about Edward saving her when she fell off the cliff ledge, but decided against it. "And he's..."

His expression melted into a buttery smile. "Enough. You've made your case quite well. Go get your gentleman and bring him in here before I change my mind," he teased.

Her father's words and warmth gladdened her heart. She embraced him, giving him a huge hug before she raced from the room, nearly tripping on her skirt.

"Edward, come quickly," she called and turned around at once.

He sprang up and followed. "What did he say?" he whispered behind her.

But they were in her father's office before she could answer.

Her father sat behind his big desk again. "Mr. Wyllie," he began, "please have a seat."

"Thank you, Sir," Edward said, appearing confident and sure of himself.

"My daughter assures me that you make her happy. And you've assured me that you can provide for her in the manner that she is accustomed to."

"Indeed, Mr. Tudor," Edward replied.

"What about the fact that you live in Barrington and she lives in Boston?" he asked.

Edward leaned forward in his chair. "I've given that some thought, Sir. I come to Boston almost every week on business. Most of my vendors are located here. Instead of staying one night, I'll stay two. That should give us sufficient time to get to know each other better and attend some of the functions in Boston."

Her father studied Edward for a moment. Then his face broke into an open, friendly smile. “You have my permission to court Dora. I will expect you to behave with all propriety and as a gentleman. She is a widow, but protecting her reputation is still important to me.”

“You have my assurance, Sir, that I will do exactly that,” he answered.

Dora was glad her father didn’t ask her to promise the same. She was certain she would have blushed furiously. She’d already behaved more wantonly than she ever thought herself capable of. She’d shamelessly kissed Edward in the carriage. When he’d stopped, she actually pleaded with him to keep kissing her! And her breasts had pressed against his chest when he hugged her. Shame filled her and she resolved to make an effort to behave more chastely. To never cause Edward to break his promise to her father.

Edward reached over, took her hand in his, and gave it a gentle squeeze. He looked back at her father. “Thank you, Mr. Tudor. Dora is an amazing woman who deserves every happiness.”

Her heart hammered foolishly at the thought of Edward courting her. She smiled at him letting her affection for this magnificent man show.

Her father sighed and then asked, “Is there anything more beautiful than young love?”

His comment didn’t surprise her. He was always a bit of a romantic, despite his legal mind and they both shared a love of the Romanticism movement in art and literature which emphasized feelings, emotions, and intuition over reason and facts.

Edward squeezed Dora’s hand again. “Yes,” he answered, surprising her. “There’s one thing more beautiful than young love. It’s the sight of an old man and an old woman blessed to still be together. Their hands may be gnarled, but they’re still clutched in affection. Their faces may be darkened by age spots and lined with wrinkles, but devotion still radiates from their eyes. Their joints may be tired and their backs bowed, but their hearts still beat strong with abiding love. Their waists may be thicker and their skin slack, but their bodies still cause ardor to ignite.”

“Well said, Mr. Wyllie,” her father said.

“I was lucky enough to see all of that in my grandparents before



they died, Mr. Tudor.” Edward continued. “Unending forever love is the true beauty of love. I believe Dora and I are meant to be together. And if we are, I pray we will have a chance to experience love’s true beauty.”

“I see you have a gift for words,” her father told him with admiration in his eyes. “And the romantic heart of a poet. Now I am even more certain that the two of you are well suited.”

Dora stared up at Edward. *He said he intended to love me*, Dora realized. His words, some of the most romantic she’d ever heard, left her speechless. With every hour she spent with Edward, her affections toward him grew more tender. And after hearing his poignant words, something intense flared deep within her. Did she love him already? Was that even possible? She’d read of love at first sight in some of her novels. Is that what had happened to them in Barrington? Ever since their meeting in the cemetery, she’d known there was some compelling attraction between them. Something was drawing them together so strongly they were helpless to resist. Was it love?

Now that the matter of their courtship was settled, she relaxed, settling back into the leather chair, feeling dreamily happy. Her heart seemed to drift along atop a cloud as she envisioned being held close within Edward’s embrace once more. For a moment, she imagined the wonderful and exciting things he might do to her.

She wanted to shut out the world for a while to contemplate the future and give free rein to her imagination, but when Edward spoke again, she was forced back to a distressing reality.

“Mr. Tudor, Sir, I have an urgent unrelated matter that we could use your help with.” Edward proceeded to tell her father about Remington Forbes and his threat to annul Sam and Catherine’s marriage. It took some time for him to finish the story and supply all the details, including describing their recent trip to Wyllie Mountain, the findings of the geologist, and that Dora engaged the scientist and the surveyor to look at Mount Webster as well.

“That was smart, Dora,” her father told her. “Mount Webster could provide you with a steady income. Let me know what they find when their study is complete. I know a reputable mine operator I can refer you to. Edward may know one as well.”

Edward continued to describe how Sam suspected the prospect of acquiring a gold mine at Wyllie Mountain motivated Forbes’ recent actions.

Her father listened attentively until Edward had finished, and then said, "Mr. Wyllie, it would be my pleasure to help your brother and his wife. I have longed to take George Abernathy down a notch or two for some time. Some of his work for Mr. Forbes is a disgrace to the legal profession."

"Father, Mr. Forbes treated Catherine abominably. He ignored their beautiful babe Rory and he wants Sam to take the child back to Kentucky without his mother."

"The man is heartless," her father agreed. "I've never met a man more greedy or controlling."

"I understand that Catherine's mother is, shall we say, a bit difficult as well," Edward pointed out.

"Indeed. My wife, Dora's mother, despised her. She considered Mrs. Forbes the most pompous woman in the city. We are up against formidable opponents. But that will make winning all the more rewarding."

"We would be most grateful for your help, Sir," Edward told him. "We will, of course, pay you your customary fee."

"We will worry about that trivia later," he said.

"How do you wish to proceed?" Edward asked.

"We need to meet with Sam and Catherine at once. I will have my clerk reschedule my appointments for today. Do you still have your carriage waiting outside?"

"Yes, Sir!" Edward confirmed.

"Would you two care to join me for an early lunch at the Bell In Hand?"

## CHAPTER 15

Edward told his carriage driver to take them to the Bell In Hand. On the way there, he sat next to Tudor, across from Dora. He took great pleasure in simply looking into her fine intelligent eyes and gazing at her lovely face.

Keeping his promise of propriety to Mr. Tudor would be one of the greatest challenges of his life. Nevertheless, he intended to keep his word and prove himself an honorable man. If the temptation proved too great, he would just make their courtship period one of the shortest to ever occur in Boston society. He wasn't bound by the rules of Boston's gentry anyway. He'd always made his own rules and followed his own instincts.

Before he could contemplate their courtship further, their carriage arrived at the Bell In Hand. He opened the carriage door and assisted Dora out, followed by her father.

"Mr. Tudor, would you like me to go up and get my brother and his wife or would you prefer to meet somewhere else?" he asked.

"Are you staying here at the inn?" Tudor asked.

"Yes, Sir, I am."

"Then, if you don't mind, we can meet in your room. We'll have more privacy. After we meet we can adjourn to the dining room."

Edward's mind raced. He hoped he'd left his room neat and orderly. But he was in such a hurry this morning to get to Catherine's father's office, he wasn't sure. He prided himself for being a neat man and disliked being slothful. "I'll show you to my room and then get Sam and Catherine," he said.

He unlocked the door to his room, relieved to see that his normal orderly habits had prevailed that morning. "Please, have a seat. I shall return shortly with my brother and Catherine."

He hurried down the hall and knocked on their door but no one

answered. "Sam," he called. Still, he heard no sign of anyone being in the room.

Edward frowned. He'd brought Dora's father all the way over here. He hadn't seen Sam and Catherine in the dining room as they'd entered. Perhaps they'd gone out for a stroll or shopping.

He raced back to his room. "I'm sorry," he told them as he entered. "They're not in their room at present. Would you please wait here for a few minutes while I try to locate them?"

"Of course," Tudor replied. "Take your time. Dora and I will just get caught up."

Edward pivoted and hurried down the hall and stairs. Relief filled him when he spotted Catherine, carrying the babe, coming in the front door of the inn. "Catherine, good morning," he greeted. "Where's Sam? I have Dora and her father up in my room waiting for both of you."

"He'll be here shortly," she replied. "He just went down the street to purchase a new whetstone. He wore out his last one sharpening his knife. Whenever he's worried about something he tends to sharpen his knife a great deal. He says it helps him think."

"I remember," Edward said, with a chuckle. "He also does it when he's forced to stay inside for any length of time."

"I went with him, but Rory decided he was hungry, so I came back."

"When you've finished would you please join us in my room?"

"Of course," she agreed. "And I'll tell Sam."

Within a few minutes, they all gathered in Edward's room. Catherine laid Rory down on the bed for a nap and covered him with a miniature blue blanket. The men remained standing while the ladies took the two chairs.

"Edward has filled me in on the details of your problem with Mr. Forbes," Tudor told Sam and Catherine. "I feel certain we can send him back to his mansion with his tail between his legs."

Sam chuckled and shook his head. "That would be a sight I'd like to see."

"I don't want him humiliated," Catherine stated, "at least not publicly. But I do want him to leave us alone."

"Mrs. Wyllie," Tudor said, eyeing Catherine kindly, "tell me the circumstances of your first husband's death."

Tudor's first question surprised Edward. It also seemed to surprise Sam.

Catherine described what had happened to her and her first husband on their journey to Kentucky and Tudor listened carefully.

"So, if I understand correctly, three men showed up on the Wilderness Trail, out of nowhere, and killed Mr. Adams," Tudor summarized. "You fought back and killed one of them with your dagger."

"Yes, I always wear this," she said, indicating an exquisite sheath that held a blade hanging from her belt at her side. A sapphire and a family crest decorated the dagger's hilt. "It was my maternal grandmother's. She gave it to my mother. And when I left for Kentucky, my mother gave it to me."

Covered by her shawl and arms, Edward had not noticed the stiletto before.

"It's fortunate your mother gave it to you," Sam said. "It saved your life on the Wilderness Trail."

"The one you managed to kill, did he appear to be the leader of the three?"

Catherine's brows furrowed. "Perhaps so. He shouted to the other two to search our wagon. Then he shot my husband in cold blood. While Mr. Adams lay dying, he came for me. That's when he got a belly full of my dagger. He thought I was unarmed."

Sam smiled proudly at his wife.

"Why didn't the other two harm you?" Edward asked.

"I don't know. Perhaps they couldn't stomach killing a woman. When they saw that I'd killed their companion, they just took off, taking a few of our things with them and my husband's horse."

Sam continued the story. "Two of my brothers tracked them into the Virginia hills, found them in the act of assaulting a young woman,

and killed them. But what does this have to do with the current situation?"

Tudor ignored Sam's question and continued to question Catherine. "Do you think the man you killed intended to assault you or just capture you?" he pressed.

"I don't know," Catherine replied, beginning to sound confused.

"Did they have any currency on them?" Tudor asked.

"As a matter of fact, they did," Sam said. "Stephen found a pouch of gold coins that weren't stolen from Catherine."

"What happened to the money?" Tudor asked.

"Once William determined that it didn't belong to Catherine, my brother gave it to the young woman who was attacked," Sam explained.

"So were you left on the Wilderness Trail without funds?" Tudor asked Catherine.

"Certainly not. We hid a great deal of coin, my jewelry, and the deed to the 10,000 acres in Kentucky beneath the floorboards of the wagon," Catherine told him. "The murderers didn't find any of it."

"I see," Tudor said. He turned to Sam. "And the three men who threatened your son Little John and then your sister-in-law Jane, they admitted to being sent by Forbes?"

"Initially, they told me they were sent by a firm in Boston that was acquiring land to quarry stone. When I refused quite strongly to sell, one of them drew his weapon. When he did, I shot him, intending to wound him. Unfortunately, his horse jerked and the shot was fatal."

"When was Forbes' name first mentioned?"

"The sheriff of Harrodsburg threatened the leader of the three, Wesley Dixon with being hanged if he didn't cooperate. Dixon admitted then that he'd been sent by Remington Forbes," Sam explained. "I recognized the name as belonging to Catherine's father, although I didn't let Dixon know that I knew who the man was."

"But if you had signed the deed, Mr. Dixon planned to kill you?"

"Forbes had authorized him to, and promised a substantial bonus

if he did. But Dixon told me he wouldn't have gone through with it."

"Did you believe him?" Tudor asked.

"What part?" Sam said. "The part about Forbes wanting me dead or the part about Dixon going through with it."

"Both," Tudor replied.

"I wasn't certain Catherine's father could do such a monstrous thing. That's one reason we came here. To find the truth. If he was capable of it, I didn't want him sending more men to Kentucky to finish the job. As far as Dixon, yes, I did believe him when he said he would not have gone through with it. When I questioned him, his eyes weren't lying."

"Did Dixon have a good deal of coin on him when he was arrested?"

"He did," Sam confirmed. "My understanding is that he used it to pay the fine the Kentucky Federal District Court in Harrodsburg imposed on him and his partner Thomas Crowell for their crimes against my family."

"Do you know where Dixon is now?" Tudor asked Sam.

"No. But I suspect he's back here in Boston. The judge ordered him to leave Kentucky at once and return to Boston. He was ordered to report to Boston's sheriff who would in turn notify the Kentucky judge that he did return to Boston as ordered."

"What about this matter of annulment?" Catherine asked, sounding impatient.

"You can stop worrying about that. It's an empty threat," Tudor said addressing Catherine. "The term 'ab initio' is legal jargon that simply means something should be treated as invalid from the outset. If a person signs a contract under duress, that contract is treated as being void ab initio. Abernathy is throwing out the term to frighten and confuse you, hoping you will think your marriage is invalid, bow to your father's will, and decide to stay in Boston."

"The bloody cur," Sam swore.

Tudor looked directly at Catherine and said, "It would be obvious to any judge that you are a strong woman who would not allow anyone to force her into anything. What Forbes and Abernathy also

didn't realize, because neither one is capable of it, is that you both love each other deeply and dearly. There is absolutely no chance of Abernathy proving that you were under duress when you married Captain Wyllie."

"Then why is he doing this?" Catherine asked.

"It's simple—greed," Tudor replied. "The man has an insatiable hunger for wealth. Including your fortune, Catherine."

"Love for each other and for their family motivates Sam and Catherine," Edward stated. "Not greed. The world would be a better place if everyone thought as they do."

"I assure you, Forbes does not," Tudor said. "That's why he thought money would be enough to get Sam to leave with his son and return to Kentucky."

Edward glanced at his brother. There wasn't enough money in the world to motivate Sam to take even a step away from Catherine when she needed him.

"Now what?" Sam asked.

"I have some investigative work to do. I'll get started right away. But not on an empty stomach. Let's eat!" Tudor declared and stood. "My treat. I'll even buy you your favorite dessert, honey," he told Dora as though she were still his little girl.

Tudor stood, clutched Dora's elbow affectionately in his beefy hands, and the two left the room chatting happily, as the rest of them followed.



## CHAPTER 16

After an enormous mid-day meal of crab cakes and boiled sweet corn, during which everyone got to know one another better, they all enjoyed dessert—cakes of many varieties including pound, gingerbread, and spice. Even Rory happily mashed a small piece of pound cake between his gums. When they finished and downed the last of their ale and coffee, Tudor announced that it was time he got to work.

“Can we be of assistance?” Edward asked, hoping he could find a way to help Catherine and Sam.

“I would welcome your help,” Tudor replied. “But Sam, you had better stay with Catherine and your babe. No telling what Forbes might do next.”

Sam nodded his agreement. “Agreed. Catherine and the babe stay by my side. But I won’t stay cooped up in this inn. We’ll go visit some horse farms today. I want to purchase a thoroughbred stallion and mare while we’re here in Boston.”

“Can I help?” Dora asked her father.

“Yes. Come along with Edward and me,” Tudor said. “Your rational mind could come in handy.”



Dora’s father and Edward spoke quietly as their carriage wove them through a maze of narrow streets paved with beach stones. Buildings crowded out the view of the wharves and the tall masts of ships nestled together in deep dark waters. The stark contrast between Boston and Barrington struck Dora. The whole population of Boston was always in motion, whereas, in Barrington, she suspected most of the residents never ventured beyond the sound of the parish bell.

Barrington was a peaceful idyllic town encased by breathtaking

scenery and majestic mountains in the distance. Its grand houses, graceful church spires, stately trees, and merchants' small stores gave it a quiet charm. Surrounded by its harbor, Boston seemed to almost float in water. And vessels from all over the world, constantly arriving, docking, or leaving, made the city noisy and crowded.

They soon returned to her father's law practice and when they were seated, her father began. "Do you know why I questioned Catherine about her first husband?"

Dora spoke up. "Because if Mr. Forbes was capable of paying men to take the life of Catherine's second husband, Captain Sam, then he might also have ordered the murder of Mr. Adams."

"Exactly," her father said.

"But why would he leave his own daughter stranded in the middle of nowhere?" Edward asked. "Surely, even Forbes isn't capable of that."

"His plan must have been to have the leader of the three murder Adams, abduct Catherine, and return her to Boston for a 'ransom'. Catherine would never have known that her abductors were actually working for her father and that she wasn't being ransomed at all. But Forbes' plan got muddled when she killed the leader with her dagger. Besides, she wouldn't have been stranded. She had money, horses, and a wagon. She was still close enough that she could have easily turned around, found the nearest town, sold the wagon and horses, and then taken a coach back to Boston. Forbes expected Catherine to come crying back to him. Later he would have persuaded her to turn the land in Kentucky over to him."

"But, she foiled his monstrous plan by having enough courage to go on to Kentucky and find her own future there," Dora concluded. "And since she killed the leader of the three, perhaps he was the only one that knew why Forbes wanted Adams killed. That's why the other two didn't search the wagon for the deed."

"Even if we can prove Adams was murdered, which is next to impossible since all three of those murderers are dead," Edward pointed out, "how would that help us now?"

"Excellent question," Tudor said. "It may not help, but it does give us some insight into the lengths Forbes will go to get what he wants. He is counting on establishing a timber operation in Kentucky and a gold mine in New Hampshire to help him out of his financial

woes.

“What financial woes?” Edward asked. “Is he in debt? I thought he was extremely wealthy.”

“He was. In fact he is one of Boston’s merchant princes who live in magnificent style. His renowned hospitality turns even strangers into friends and spreads his fame so that business is nearly thrown into his hands.”

Edward shook his head. “Nevertheless, my guess is that Forbes was acquiring a fortune at the same time that he was spending one.”

“Just so,” her father confirmed. “A few of my colleagues have done some work for him recently, but withdrew their services when Forbes wanted them to do some things that were underhanded and unethical. Apparently, Forbes is over-extended. An adventurous enterpriser by nature, lately he’s grown more daring, investing money in one speculative venture after the other.”

“There’s something to be said for taking a risk to test a new idea or enterprise,” Edward said, “but investing in speculative business undertakings should be done cautiously and sparingly.”

“His most daring project may be his undoing. A couple of years ago, he turned seaward to grow his business empire. He invested heavily in building a 260-ton ship. He sent it fully loaded, primarily with salted cod, to Jamaica where they feed the fish to the sugar plantation slaves. His Captain arranged for a return cargo of sugar, molasses, cattle, sheep, rum, and slaves. The overly burdened vessel encountered a hurricane and sank. The ill-fated voyage put Forbes in serious financial trouble.”

“No wonder he has substantial debt,” Edward said.

Her father picked up his pipe, began filling it with tobacco, and said, “If his ship had not sunk, he would have made at least a thousand percent profit.”

Astounded, Dora’s eyes widened.

Her father cautioned, “Please don’t share any of this with Catherine. I don’t wish to add to her stress or worry her further.”

Dora nodded her agreement.

Edward said, “Of course, we understand. Now what?”

“What we must do now is find Wesley Dixon.”

“How do we do that?” Dora asked.

“Tell me where to look, I’ll find him,” Edward said.

Her father appeared to consider that for a moment and then said, “I know a man who works in the warehouse down at the India Wharf on Commercial Street. For a small monthly fee, he keeps up with most of the unsavory types in town for me. His sleuthing and familiarity with these characters has come in handy several times.”

“His name?” Edward asked.

“Horatio Harris. He’s glib-tongued and popular down there at the piers and in the local taverns. He seems to know everyone,” Tudor explained. “Tell him I sent you and that I will double his normal fee for the month if he can lead you to Wesley Dixon. It may take him a day or two to locate the man.” Tudor reached into a drawer and pulled out a pouch of coins. “Don’t give Horatio Harris anything, I’ll take care of him. But once you find Dixon, give him half of this. Promise the other half after I’ve had a chance to speak to him.”

Edward shook his head. “That won’t be necessary, Sir. I can take care of it.”

“No, take this,” Tudor insisted. “I know precisely what these types expect. You don’t want to give them a single coin more or less.”

“If you insist,” Edward said.

“I would advise you to take your carriage down there and have it wait for you. Be back before dark. Although you appear quite capable of taking care of yourself, the docks at night are not a fit place for any human being, much less a gentleman. Cutthroats and cutpurses come out at night faster than the rats and cats.”

“Thanks for the words of caution. I know these menaces well,” Edward agreed. “I’ve been buying goods for my stores here in the city for years.”

“I’ll take Dora to her home so that you can leave as soon as possible,” Tudor offered. “Then I’m going to go speak to a few of my friends to see if I can learn anything that might be helpful about this rush to open gold mines in New Hampshire’s mountains.”

“Thank you, Sir,” Edward said. “Your invaluable help means a

great deal to me and to my brother.” He bent to place a chaste kiss on Dora’s hand. “I’ll see you later. Would you dine with me this evening?”

The sensation of his lips brushing softly across the back of her hand left her breathless. “I would be delighted, Sir,” she told him, her voice throaty. “Father, will you join us?”

“No, must decline. I fear the day’s turmoil will make me want to retire early tonight.”

The prospect of dinner later with Edward made Dora’s pulse race and her stomach flutter with excitement. Till then, she would count the minutes until his return from the docks.



Edward left his carriage and driver some distance away and strode swiftly toward India Wharf. He passed numerous structures most of which were counting houses and warehouses filled with merchandise.

The crews of enormous ships labored to discharge their cargoes upon shore while dockers worked to securely lash up parcels of goods awaiting shipment. He heard the scraping and creaking of hoisting blocks and the shouts of burly longshoremen as they rolled and stacked barrels of sugar, molasses, and coffee.

More workers used longshoreman’s hooks to pile bales of wool and cotton upon wood pilings. Others shouted as they counted off great loads of timber that would be used to build growing cities.

Waiting heavy freight wagons, drawn by four, six and eight horses, lined up one behind the other to carry goods off to hundreds of destinations to the north and south. With the settlement of Kentucky, some would even venture west to unload their cargo upon transport vessels that would move the goods down the Ohio River.

Edward soon found the India Wharf’s warehouse. When he entered, mysterious scents assailed him, heralding the warehouse’s exotic contents—carpets, pungent pepper, tea, and dozens of other items.

After several inquiries of the workers there, he finally located Horatio Harris. The shorter man’s muscular arms were a testament to

his occupation. His face and dark hair were greasy, but his appearance was otherwise neat.

Harris tugged Edward outside to speak to him privately. "I don't want my boss to wonder what I'm up to. Let's go over near the privies to talk."

They walked a short distance and Edward knew they had arrived by the acrid stench.

"It stinks enough to keep even the most prying ears and eyes away," Harris said chuckling. "And my boss will only think nature called."

Edward quickly summarized the reason for his visit.

"Aye. I think I know the gent," Harris revealed. "Saw him at a tavern recently. He just came back from Kentucky looking worse than before he left. The west weren't much of a paradise for him. He swore there were men there as tall as giants and mountain lions lurking in every other tree top."

"We would be grateful for your help in locating the man," Edward said. "The information Dixon may know could help a woman who is facing a serious problem."

"Is she pretty?" he asked, with a turn of his head and a wink. "I'm much more inclined to help the pretty ones."

"Indeed, most everyone would call her beautiful."

"Then count me in, but for double my normal fee, of course."

Edward nodded. "Mr. Tudor will take care of that." He coughed trying to rid his nostrils and throat of the unpleasant odor. "I'm staying at the Bell In Hand Inn. When you determine where Dixon can be found, please come to see me, but don't alert the man that someone is looking for him."

"I can tell you where Dixon is right now," Harris declared, taking Edward by surprise. "I saw him just this afternoon here on the docks."

"Where?"

"Boarding a ship bound for England."

## CHAPTER 17

Dora's home on Beacon Hill stood on a three-peaked grassy slope that overlooked the town. The expansive view allowed her to watch for carriages coming up her street. She was so anxious to spot Edward's carriage, she couldn't keep from peering out the window every few minutes. But it was growing dark and foggy, making it difficult to see very far.

She couldn't believe she was acting so foolishly. For heaven's sake, she was behaving like a flighty schoolgirl. She took a seat in her candlelit parlor and began reading a poem, set the book down again, sighed, and picked it up again. But it was useless, she couldn't possibly sit still. She started to pace the room. With each step her heart raced faster.

Marie came into the parlor. "Would you like some tea while you wait, Mrs. Williams?"

"That would be nice," she told her. "Thank you, Marie. After the cook brings it to me, you can both retire for the night. I'm going to dine with Mr. Wyllie."

"Very well. I hope he arrives soon. Good night then."

She sat down again in her favorite chair wanting to think. It hardly seemed possible that she'd known Edward only a week. Yet her life was not the same anymore. She had a feeling it would never be the same. In that short amount of time, he'd made her realize she was a desirable woman—not some cast aside widow denied happiness. He'd even made her feel beautiful for the first time in her life.

And he seemed to believe in her dreams and aspirations. He supported her desire to achieve something, to grasp a more exciting future. Energized by his encouragement, she was more than ready for that future to start. If only she knew where it would take her.



“Boarding? As a passenger or a worker?” Edward demanded.

“He was boarding a packet ship with all the other steerage passengers,” Horatio answered.

“What packet?”

“The White Star.”

“Has she set sail yet?”

Horatio walked a short distance away and peered down the street. “There she is, anchored at Pier Five.” He pointed toward the vessel.

“My thanks,” Edward mumbled and took off running. When he reached the enormous packet, he slid to a stop, raced down the pier and up onto at the gangplank.

“Well ye just made it,” a man with a cockney accent told him. “Your ticket, Sir?”

“I’m not traveling. I’m searching for a man. Wesley Dixon.”

The ticket taker scanned his passenger list. “Aye, he’s on board. Steerage Level. Traveling alone. One-way ticket. But you don’t have enough time to find him, Sir. We cast off in a jiffy for Liverpool.”

Edward couldn’t let Dixon leave. “How do I get to the steerage level?”

“It’s ’tween the cabins and the hold. But you’ll never find the bloke. There’s too many passengers down there!”

“Give me ten minutes,” he called back as he took off.

“Saints above, Sir,” the man shouted, “the captain says when we cast off! Not me.”

Edward ran toward the hatch that likely led down. “Steerage down here?” he asked the nearest man. The man nodded and he took the narrow and steep stairs two at a time, bypassed the cabin level passage way, descended another level, and found steerage. The packet ship, which carried mail, cargo, and people, grew dark below its upper deck. When his eyes became accustomed to the gloomy dimness, he observed that steerage was indeed crowded. He knew the damp quarters, limited sanitation, and stormy seas would make it also dirty



and foul-smelling well before the vessel reached Liverpool. Rats, lice, fleas, and disease were common stowaways.

“Wesley Dixon!” Edward shouted. “Wesley Dixon!” He passed row upon row of crude wooden double-deck bunks set up along both sides of the ship fore to aft. Each bunk held four or five persons, sometimes entire families.

Since he didn’t know what the man looked like, he had no choice but to keep calling out Dixon’s name. Over and over, people glanced his way, but no one responded. He worked his way through them stem to stern refusing to give up.

“Why do you want to find Wesley Dixon?” a heavy-set man with a puffy face finally asked.

“Are you Mr. Dixon?”

The man eyed him suspiciously, seeming to take notice of Edward’s fine attire and polished boots. “Why do you want to know?”

“I don’t have time to explain, Sir. But it is of upmost importance that you return to shore. I will offer you these coins to do so.” Edward let half the coins fall into the palm of his own hand. The gold coins glittered enticingly in the dim light before he quickly put them back in the pouch and stuffed the cinched bag back in his pocket. “The other half is yours when you’ve told us what we need to know about Remington Forbes.”

“I know he’s a bloody bastard,” Dixon sneered.

“Come with me. Hurry, the ship is casting off any minute!” Edward pleaded.

Dixon remained planted where he was. “But Forbes’ man gave me a paid ticket to England.”

“Then, as well as the coin, I’ll provide you with a replacement ticket for you to sail in a first-class cabin like those above. I’ll even pay for someone to sail with you. Would you like that?”

Dixon’s eyes widened. “Indeed I would, Sir. I already hate it down here in steerage and we haven’t yet left the dock.” He snatched his bag from underneath a bunk.

Edward felt the ship begin to move. “Let’s go!”

The two raced above and the first glimpse of sunlight and the smell of the sea thrilled Edward as never before. He pitied the poor steerage passengers who faced weeks at sea in that dark hell hole.

“Sorry, Sir, but you’re too late,” the ticket taker said. “The Captain just shoved off. You’ll have to pay for your passage now. Steerage or cabin?”

Edward stuffed the coin pouch even deeper into his waistcoat pocket and then shoved his pistol further into his breeches. He handed the ticket taker his pocket watch. “My gift to you, Sir. May you put it to good use for many years to come.”

He grabbed ahold of Dixon’s coat collar and the back of the man’s breeches and heaved the protesting portly man overboard, bag and all. Then he took a smooth dive after him into the chilly waters of the Atlantic.

He wished he’d left that new watch in his room because he wanted to count every single minute that time gave him with Dora.

## CHAPTER 18

“So you witnessed Dixon actually board the White Star?” Forbes asked John Appleton.

“I did, Sir. He’s bound for England, just as you wished,” the agent replied. “With a one-way ticket, I believe he’s gone for good.”

“Good riddance. What about Crowell?”

“Dixon told me that Thomas returned home to Virginia where his family lived.”

“Excellent. I doubt he’ll ever be back either. That cleans this mess up a good bit.”

“With the two of them gone, it will be Captain Wyllie’s word against mine. No judge in the city would believe I authorized Dixon to kill Wyllie,” Forbes said.

“Agreed. Do you have anything else I can help you with?”

Forbes smiled knowingly. “As a matter of fact, there is.”



Gazing out the window of their room, Sam was glad to see the sun set. The sooner this day was over, the better. He was not a patient man and waiting was certainly not one of his strengths. He was sure they would hear from Tudor tomorrow morning, but he hoped to learn something from his brother tonight.

Where was Edward anyway? He should have been back by now. Perhaps he had taken Dora out to dinner before returning. He turned around and sat down next to Catherine.

“Sam, why do you think Mr. Tudor was questioning me about my first husband’s murder? That has nothing to do with the current situation,” she said as Rory nursed.

Sam wasn't sure he wanted to explain that until he knew the truth for sure. Telling her that her father may have murdered her first husband to get the deed to the ten-thousand acres would come as a great shock to her. "I suspect he just wanted to understand what's happened from beginning to end," he told her.

He could sense that Catherine was fighting a battle within herself. Part of her wanted a normal happy relationship with her parents and part of her wanted to never see them again. The conflict was hammering at her and the harder she tried to resolve it, the more confused she became. She could not stop herself from hoping that her parents would accept Sam for who is really was. And that they would love their grandson for the great gift the child was.

Unfortunately, the undeniable and dreadful facts convinced him that the likelihood of that happening was extraordinarily slim.

The day of reckoning was coming soon and he prayed Catherine would emerge unscathed. He would do everything in his power to protect her.

Catherine finished feeding Rory and laid him in the cradle.

She watched Sam as he rocked the cradle for a few minutes, drew Rory's blanket over him, and gently patted the babe's back as his son drifted off to sleep.

"It's hard to believe my father could spurn such a blessing—a new grandson of his own blood," she whispered.

Sam suspected that Forbes thought the child's blood had been tainted by his blood.

"His callous attitude is certainly not Christian," Catherine added.

Sam stood up. "He has no more faith than his mount," Sam told her, then wished he hadn't. "I'm terribly sorry, I should not have said that. I've no right to judge."

She shook her head sadly. "You're right. He professes to be a Christian, but he is so hard-hearted it does make me wonder if the Lord's words have ever reached his ears, much less his heart."

Matthew 7 came to Sam's mind. "Grapes are not gathered from thorn bushes nor figs from thistles."

"And every tree that does not bring forth good fruit is cut down,"

Catherine quoted, her sad eyes glittering with unshed tears.

Someday, Forbes would pay dearly for how he'd treated his daughter, but Sam didn't say so. Instead, he wrapped his arms around Catherine and hugged her.

She sank into his embrace and laid her head upon his chest. Her arms clung to him until she seemed to recover from her shaky emotions. "Sam, I'm going to bed early. This predicament with father and mother has left me exhausted. I could use a good night's sleep. Maybe I'll feel better about everything in the morning."

"It's understandable that you should be tired. I'll go wait downstairs for Edward so we won't disturb you. Hopefully, he won't be much longer."

He helped her out of her gown and kissed her goodnight, savoring the feel of her soft full lips.

She smiled up at him. "Wake me if they've learned anything important, otherwise I'll talk to you in the morning my love."

"I love you, my treasure," he told her as he pulled the covers over her. She would always be his treasure, more valuable than all the gold in the world.

He strapped on his knife and went downstairs. The inn's tavern was still crowded and lively. He hoped the noise would not keep Catherine awake.

He took a small table near the door wanting to spot Edward as soon as he entered.

After ordering an ale, he took out his new whetstone. Feeling restless and irritable, he began sharpening his knife. As he slid the blade's edge against the stone, he could not help but hear some of the conversations around him, especially the exchanges of two young men who were speaking loudly.

A heavy dose of sarcasm filled the tall man's high-pitched voice. "Mark my words, the bloody Brits haven't given up. The Jay Treaty is one-sided in Britain's favor."

"We now enjoy a beneficial relationship with Britain," his companion argued. "The treaty allows us to conduct trade with the protection of Britain's fleet. Winning the war gave us great economic power."

“I predict relations with Britain will again turn increasingly hostile and eventually lead to war yet again,” the taller man declared. “How many more lives will be lost for the sake of politics?”

“At least the Jay Treaty gives us a chance to postpone war until the United States is strong enough to handle it. It’s best to wait until we are economically and politically capable of fighting another war,” the companion pointed out.

“I say we might be better off if we were still an English colony,” the tall young man retorted. “Then the prospect of war would not loom over us like the sword of Damocles.”

That did it. Sam stood and with hardened eyes strode toward their table. He thrust his knife into the center of the wooden tabletop in front of the two. The air vibrated with the sound of the powerful blade piercing the wood.

The startled men jumped in their seats and then they both stiffened and leaned back in their chairs.

In a strong voice, Sam told them, “Do you see this blade gentlemen? During the Revolution, I used this weapon to fight for our country. If needed, it will go to war again. As long as I am able, I will fight for America until our country is secure from *all* its enemies, no matter where they come from. Then my son will use it to do the same. Americans do not cower to their enemies. And we do not shrink from the duty to defend our nation. Nor do we fight for economic power or politics, as you men called it. We fight for freedom—a God-given value worth protecting at all costs.”

As Sam ripped the words out, people all around them stared and when he finished, many applauded.

“Here, here!” someone cried out.

“God bless America,” another man shouted.

“God bless America!” Sam called back.

The still wide-eyed men at the table motioned for Sam to take a seat.

“Please, Sir ...we apologize if our conversation offended you,” one stammered. “And we thank you...for your service to our new nation.”

“May we have the honor of knowing your name?” the tall one asked.

“Captain Sam Wyllie,” he told them, but remained standing. He withdrew his blade and sheathed it.

“Captain Wyllie, I am Charles Horton and this is my friend Burnis Stephens. Would you care to join us?”

“I thank you, Sirs, but no. I am awaiting my brother’s imminent arrival.”

“At least let us buy you an ale,” the companion offered, motioning a waiter over. “I wasn’t old enough to fight during the Revolution, but I admire and honor those who did. It was a brutal war.”

“It was indeed. And I thank you for your kindness,” Sam said, “but there’s no need to honor me. Honor the many who sacrificed their lives by remembering what we fought for—*your* freedom.”

They nodded and he returned to his table, feeling eyes from all over the room turned toward him.

As he took his seat, the two men resumed their conversation with lowered voices.

He speculated that the two young men had no idea how many people—men and women, old and young—lost their lives in defense of freedom during the Revolution. Many of them were his friends.

He gazed into his ale and wondered how many more would die to defend liberty in the future? Would Little John and Rory have to fight too, maybe even lose their lives?

He picked up one of the several ales, just sent to his table by those who admired his words, and took a long sip as a profound truth struck him.

There will be no end to the need for freedom’s defense.

## CHAPTER 19

Edward popped up from the murky water and searched for Dixon. The man floundered behind him, arms splashing and flailing frantically, as he came up out of the water.

With a look of panic on his pudgy face, Dixon yelled, "Help, I can't swim!" Then, thrashing wildly, he sank again.

Edward reached down and lugged Dixon to the surface. "Calm yourself, I can swim for both of us."

Dixon sputtered and coughed as Edward grabbed the man's coat collar and then the bag floating in the water. "Hold this," he told Dixon, thrusting the bag against the man's broad belly. He plucked Dixon's tricorne from the water and shoved it onto the man's balding head. Treading water, he reached out with some difficulty and snatched his own tricorne before it could float away.

He quickly started paddling and kicking toward the ladder hanging from the dock, staying close to the pier. Within moments, he shoved Dixon onto the ladder. "Climb up," he shouted.

Dixon grabbed the ladder and slowly hauled himself up, rung by rung.

Edward prayed the ladder would hold the man's weight and not break before he had a chance to climb up as well.

Soon they both stood facing each other on the dock.

"You bloody no good..." Dixon blurted from his exertion reddened face. "Why the hell did you do that?"

"Because it was a lot faster than sailing to England and turning around again," Edward said, laughing. "My apologies."

"This is no laughing matter," Dixon swore, shivering. "I could have drowned. I may still catch a fever."



“You’re far too valuable to me to let you drown. And a warm fire and a few ales will ward off a fever.”

“Who the hell are you anyway?” Dixon asked, eyes narrowed.

“Edward Wyllie, Sir, at your service.”

Dixon’s eyes grew wide and he started to back away. “You’re his brother ain’t you? I can see him in your features and eyes.”

“I have four brothers, Sir, but if you are referring to Captain Sam Wyllie, yes, he is my eldest brother. Of all my brothers, I look the most like him. He wants to speak with you.”

“That’s mighty peculiar. Your brother told me that if he ever set eyes upon me again, I was a dead man. Why does he want to see me now?”

“That will become clear shortly. But I assure you, your life is safe in our hands. We are men of principle who will honor our bargain with you.”

“I got a damn good taste of your brother’s principles while I was in Kentucky,” Dixon declared. “I have no desire to be the recipient of his wrath again.”

“Then cooperate with us and you will have this pouch of gold,” Edward said, patting his waistcoat pocket. “And you will enjoy a first-class voyage to England. You do want to get as far away from Forbes as you possibly can don’t you?” He knew it was likely that Forbes had threatened Dixon’s life.

“How’d you know that?”

“Sir, it has grown dark. We’re standing here dripping wet. Could you accompany me to my inn where I will buy you a nice meal and an ale and you can sit before the fire and warm up? Then we will answer all your questions.”

“The gold first,” Dixon said, extending his hand.

Edward raked his fingers over his head to get his dripping hair out of his face. “I’ll give it to you the moment you sit down face to face with my brother. And his lawyer.”

Dixon clutched his bag tightly against his chest. “Lawyer? I don’t want any more trouble with the law.”

“If all goes well, Forbes is the one who will be in trouble with the law. Come along, we must hurry.”

Huffing and puffing, Dixon barely managed to keep up with Edward’s long-legged stride as they made their way toward his waiting carriage.

“Glad I am to see you, Mr. Wyllie. I don’t fancy sitting here in the dark waiting for scamps and scoundrels to come along,” his driver said. “I was just about to leave.”

“Thank you for waiting so long, good Sir. I’m sorry we were delayed. I will make it worth your while.”

The coachman gawked at their wet attire. “It looks like you went for a swim.”

“More like a dunking,” Dixon grumbled as he climbed into the carriage.

“Please take us to Court Street, near Bowdoin Square, to the home of Mr. Tudor.”

“I know the area well, Mr. Wyllie. I’ll have you there in a flash.”

“Who is Tudor?” Dixon asked after the driver shut the carriage door.

“He’s my brother’s lawyer,” Edward answered. “I want to pick him up and take him with us.”

As soon as they reached Tudor’s impressive home, Edward raced up to the door and pounded on it.

A servant opened the heavy door. “Yes?”

“Please tell Mr. Tudor that Edward Wyllie is outside with Mr. Dixon and we would like him to join us if he is available.”

With widened eyes, the servant took in Edward’s wet clothing and disheveled appearance and then promptly shut the door.

Edward heard the lock slide into place. “Hell,” Edward swore. But he decided to wait a few minutes. Perhaps the servant would take his name to Tudor after all.

Within no more than a minute or two, Tudor flung the door wide

open. "You have Dixon with you?"

"I do, Sir. He's waiting in the carriage. I thought we might take him to see Sam now."

"What on earth happened? Did you have to find him in the middle of Boston Harbor?"

"In point of fact ..."

"You can tell me later. Let me get my coat and hat."

Edward waited for Tudor by the carriage, holding the door open for the lawyer. As soon as Tudor climbed aboard, he told the driver to take them to the Bell In Hand Inn.

"Mr. Tudor, may I present Mr. Wesley Dixon," Edward said, as soon as Tudor sat down.

"Mr. Dixon, thank you for agreeing to meet with us."

"Mr. Wyllie promised me a pouch of gold and a first-class ticket to England for two," Dixon stated, seeming to want Tudor to confirm the arrangement.

Tudor raised his brows and glanced over at Edward who shrugged. "He was already on board the White Star in steerage. I found him and promised him a better journey if he cooperated."

"How did you both get wet?" Tudor asked.

Edward told him the tale which caused Tudor to begin chuckling. Soon Edward joined him and to his surprise, so did Dixon. The three of them were laughing when Edward suddenly remembered his promise to take Dora to dinner. He held up a hand to silence them.

"Stop the carriage," Edward yelled out.

The driver tugged the horses to a sudden stop.

"What's the fastest route to Dora's house?" he asked Tudor.

## CHAPTER 20

Dora stared slack-jawed at Edward standing in her doorway. He stood there tall and straight and dripping wet. His shirt was so wet it clung tantalizingly to his well-muscled arms and broad chest. He must have left his jacket in the carriage. His wet hair appeared even darker than normal and caught the light of the porch lantern. She forced her mouth closed and tried to ignore the intense attraction that abruptly welled within her.

“My apologies for keeping you waiting,” he said immediately. “I had to board a packet, jump ship, save a drowning man, and then collect your father.”

“Good heavens! Are you all right? Is everything okay?”

“Yes, can you please come with us? I have Dixon and your father waiting in the carriage.”

“Of course.” She grabbed her bag and cloak and shut the door behind her. “Where are we going?”

“The Bell In Hand,” he answered. “To speak with Sam and Catherine. It’s certainly not the romantic dinner I had in mind, but I’m afraid it will have to do for now.”

Dora climbed into the carriage and said hello to her father who introduced her to Dixon. Edward’s coat hung from a hook on the opposite side. Moisture dripped from the hem of the coat.

She started to sit down, but Edward clutched her elbow stopping her. “That’s where I was sitting. It will be quite wet.”

“Thank you.” She took another step and sat down beside the wet spot.

Edward sat and stretched his long arm across the back of the seat.

The nearness of his arm instantaneously made butterflies flutter

against her stomach. Her fingers flew to her throat when she felt a warm blush creep up her neck. She wished they were alone in the carriage on their way to a romantic dinner. The evening was definitely not going as she had envisioned. But it couldn't be helped. They needed to help Catherine and Sam. Romance would just have to wait a day or two.

She glanced at Dixon who was smoothing his hair back and then trying to rub some of the wrinkles out of his clothing. She didn't trust the man. After all, he was the one who threatened Sam's family. Uncomfortable around him, she folded her arms across her chest and looked away.

Edward seemed to sense her discomfort. "Mr. Dixon has agreed to cooperate."

"Just how am I going to 'cooperate'?" Dixon asked. "You never mentioned what you needed to know."

Her father spoke up. "We will get to that in a few minutes, Sir. It would be better if we waited until we can all join Captain Wyllie."

"I'm sorry we kept you from retiring early tonight, Sir," Edward said. "But I thought it best, since I was able to locate Mr. Dixon so soon that we try to get this matter with Forbes resolved as quickly as possible."

Dora wondered if Edward wanted it all over with so he could begin their courting in earnest. If so, she agreed with him wholeheartedly.

"No worries," her father told Edward. "I had a chance to rest briefly and I am no longer tired."

Without warning, a hand closed over her left shoulder. Her eyes widened and she sought her father's face, certain he would be frowning at Edward. But he was looking out the window, as was Dixon.

Edward subtly caressed the top of her shoulder with the knuckle of his thumb, causing a tingle to race down her arm.

She glanced up and into his face, still handsome even though it was grimy and damp.

Edward's starry-eyed gaze bore into her, daringly. "You look exquisite this evening."

She couldn't believe he'd say something so adoring in front of her father. What was *he* thinking?

"She does look stunning," her father agreed. "I believe my daughter may be the best looking young woman in all of Boston."

She couldn't believe what she was hearing. What was *her father* thinking? She glanced from one to the other, stunned.

"I couldn't agree more, Mr. Tudor," Edward said, grinning at her.

Dora was sure she was blushing over every square inch of her body. She found herself hoping they would arrive soon. As if her wish had been granted, the coach pulled to a stop in front of the Bell In Hand.

Edward motioned for her father and Mr. Dixon to disembark first. As they did, he turned to her and placed a quick secret kiss on her lips. He whispered with sweet candor, "Smile. A beautiful woman should always smile. And you *are* beautiful."

His words made her heart melt and her face spread into an irrepressible smile she thought might last the rest of her life.



Edward asked the others to remain in the lobby while he found Sam. It didn't take him long. His brother waited for him at a small table near the entrance. Four empty mugs sat on the table and Sam grinned broadly at him when he strode up. Sam rarely drank, so it surprised him to see that his brother had consumed several ales. But he was such a big man, he could probably consume much more before he would become tipsy.

"Edward, I've been waiting for you."

"For some time, from the looks of it," Edward noted. "I've brought Mr. Tudor and Dora. And Wesley Dixon."

At the mention of Dixon's name, Sam seemed to sober instantly. "How did you find him and why are you wet?"

"It's a long soggy story. Will you find us a table for five preferably close to the hearth? I assume Catherine won't be joining us."

“No, she was tired and went to bed some time ago,” Sam said.

“I’m going to go wash up and change quickly,” Edward told him. “Will you escort the others to the table?”

“Certainly, brother,” Sam said, standing.

“And order some strong coffee,” Edward called over his shoulder.



Dora watched as Edward waved to them and nimbly raced up the stairs, his powerfully built legs taking the steps three at a time. Probably going to go change his clothes, she thought. Considering that he smelled of the not so clean harbor water, that was definitely a good thing.

Mr. Dixon, who stood next to her, carried the same fishy scent and needed to change too. But since his traveling bag was still dripping a little water, she doubted that he had a spare set of dry clothes.

Sam strode up and eyed Dixon, his eyes scornful. “My brother just went up to change clothes,” Sam told them. “I located a table over here, if you will follow me.”

They trailed Sam to an area by the hearth that was already clearing out. Most people had eaten or drunk their fill by now and were filing out of the inn to head to their homes or going upstairs to their beds for the night.

Dixon sat closest to the fire and after Sam ordered coffee for all of them, they sat in an uncomfortable silence waiting for Edward.

Dora expected her father to start questioning Dixon, but he didn’t. Her eyes shifted from one person to the other.

Finally, Sam spoke, addressing Dixon. “The last time we spoke, you were facing punishment in Harrodsburg. And I told you then that if you ever came near my family again you would be a dead man.”

A muscle quivered on Dixon’s jaw. “I’m only here because that brother of yours dragged me here with the promise of gold and passage to England,” he declared defensively. “I’d be well out to sea were it not for his interference.”

Dora noticed Sam's eyes flash with remembered anger, but his voice hid it well. "Don't worry Mr. Dixon, you are safe with us. You've paid for your crimes against my family."

"However," Tudor said, "now is your chance to make moral restitution to the Wyllies."

Dixon's face grew suspicious. "How?" he asked warily.

Dora turned her head as she heard Edward hurrying down the stairs.

"Thank you all for waiting," he said as he strode up. He wore black leather breeches and a white shirt opened at the collar with no cravat. He'd left his wet tricorne in his room and his reddened face looked like he'd scrubbed it vigorously to get it clean. Hatless and clad in casual attire, he appeared youthful and even more vigorous.

When he bent to sit down, she caught a glimpse of his broad muscular chest. When he spotted where she was looking, his face split into a knowing grin. The glow of his smile warmed her even from across the table.

A waiter served the coffee for all of them. "I'll take two cups," Dixon told the man. Then they all ordered dinner.

"Here's the first half of the gold coins," Edward told Dixon. "You'll get the rest later."

Dixon stuffed the coin pouch into one of his pockets and her father began questioning him at once. A skilled interrogator, he soon had Dixon admitting exactly what Forbes had instructed him to do in Kentucky.

"He wanted that deed to Wyllie Mountain at all costs," Dixon explained. "He threatened to kill us if we came back without it. And after we had a signed deed, we would receive a bonus if we killed Captain Wyllie too. Forbes specifically told us not to harm Captain Wyllie's wife. He never explained why."

Edward told him. "Because Captain Wyllie's wife Catherine is Forbes' daughter."

Dixon's eyes widened. "Bloody hell! You mean Forbes wanted us to kill his own daughter's husband?"

"Indeed," her father confirmed.



“The man is even more heartless than I thought he was,” Dixon said, shaking his head. “As you know, Captain, I wasn’t exactly a man of high moral principles either. But I would never stoop to murder. I would never have gone through with killing you. I just wanted Forbes to pay me for getting the deed. I didn’t care about the bonus.”

“Mr. Dixon, will you come to my office tomorrow morning at 9:00 and let me take your testimony down in writing before witnesses?” Tudor asked.

“If you will buy me a room here for the night. I don’t want to go back to my boarding house in case Forbes has a man watching it.”

Edward stood at once. “I’ll go arrange a room for you now.”

Dixon eyed him. “And after Mr. Tudor takes my testimony, you’ll take me down to the docks and buy me two first-class tickets to England?”

“You have my word,” Edward promised and then left.

“Is there anything else you would like to tell us?” her father probed.

Dixon squinted his eyes and chewed on his lower lip for a few moments. Then he grinned coyly. “That mountain he wants so badly—Forbes knows it’s chock full of gold.”

## CHAPTER 21

Edward requested the room next to his for Dixon. “Please charge my account for the room. And, if you would not reveal his room’s location to anyone who might inquire, I would greatly appreciate it.”

“That room isn’t used much,” the clerk replied. “It’s quite small.”

“It will do just fine,” he told the man. He took the key and strode back to the table to get Dixon.

“I have a key to your room, Sir,” Edward told him.

Dixon reached out for the key.

Tudor held up a hand, stopping Edward. “No, I think we should lock him in,” the lawyer said. “Not that we don’t trust you Mr. Dixon, we just can’t risk losing you when we’re so close to having the evidence we need. You’ll be safer with the door locked in case anyone followed you here.”

Dixon rolled his eyes. “I don’t care if you lock me up or not. I just want to get out of these wet clothes and get warm.” The man spoke with a mouth full of food and then tossed a piece of bread into his still chewing mouth as a drop of sauce ran down his chin.

Edward had to look away. The man’s mother must have neglected to teach her son table manners. He wiped his own face with his napkin, his appetite gone. Nonetheless, despite Dixon’s course manners, his unpolished exterior, and his questionable principles, he thought a good man might lay hidden beneath it all. Would Dixon ever have the moral courage to let that good man out?

“I have a nightshirt you can sleep in,” Edward told him, “since everything in your bag is undoubtedly wet.” He wouldn’t miss the nightshirt. He normally slept stark-naked except on the coldest of nights or if he were sleeping in someone else’s home.

“That’s kind of you, Sir,” Dixon said, refilling his mug from the pitcher of ale on the table. He grabbed his fork, threw another slice of

bread and a few more oysters onto his plate and picked up his mug. "I'll finish this upstairs in my room. I'll enjoy it a lot more when I'm out of these wet clothes."

Edward believed the rest of them would enjoy their dinner a lot more too with Dixon gone.

Carrying the man's bag for him, he took Dixon upstairs, got the sleeping gown from his own room, and took him next door. "I'll wake you in the morning in time to have breakfast before we go to Mr. Tudor's office." He locked the man in and hurried back downstairs.

When he sat down, he let out a breath and then took a drink of ale. "Well, I'm glad that's taken care of."

"Mr. Tudor, what exactly do you plan to do with the evidence, as you called it," Sam asked. "Do you plan to prosecute Forbes?"

"No," Tudor said, wiping a crumb from his mouth. "Catherine told us she didn't want her father publicly humiliated. I'm going to go visit Forbes' lawyer and let him know that I have Dixon's sworn and witnessed statement. I will assure him it will remain locked in my safe if Forbes agrees to stop this nonsense about an annulment and refrains from further attempts to acquire Wyllie Mountain or your land in Kentucky, Captain."

"Do you think that will work?" Sam asked.

"Yes, I do. George Abernathy is a dandy fart catcher, pardon my language Dora. Mostly from walking too close behind Forbes for so long, but he's not a stupid man. After I meet with him, he'll agree to persuade Forbes to stop thinking about the land in Kentucky and to forget the gold mine in New Hampshire."

"But will Forbes agree?" Edward asked, remembering the man's financial woes.

"I believe he will," Tudor said. "He's a financial wizard, he'll find another way to solve his current situation."

"What situation?" Sam asked.

Tudor told him, "Let's just say Forbes needs to find other significant sources of income."

"So, you think that after you call upon Abernathy and convince him that we have proof that Forbes tried to have me killed, the matter

will be effectively settled then?" Sam asked.

"Yes," Tudor answered. "They will want to avoid that fact getting out, or taken to court, at all costs. And I will imply that questions have been raised concerning the circumstances of Adams' death. If Boston society learned of it, Forbes' reputation would turn to mud and it would mean financial disaster for him."

"What happens after you meet with Abernathy?" Sam asked.

"You and Catherine can return to Kentucky if you like," Tudor answered.

"The sooner the better, as far as I'm concerned," Sam said. "But I worry that Catherine will want to try again to smooth things over with her parents. She hasn't given up hope that they will change their mind about Rory and me." His eyes grew troubled and his forehead creased.

"Sam, would you allow Edward and me to try? We could visit them and perhaps make Catherine's parents see reason," Dora suggested.

Edward started to object but Dora's warm hazel eyes gazed at him full of expectation and he didn't want to disappoint her.

"Dora, dear," her father began, "I know you believe you can reason through this, but Mr. and Mrs. Forbes do not view the world through the eyes of reason. They view the world from a pedestal that they've put themselves on."

Sam nodded his agreement. "They certainly act as if we should all revere them."

"I realize that," Dora told them, "but we have to try. If we fail, we fail. But we'll never know what we might have been able to do if we don't try."

Edward admired her determination even if it would likely prove futile.

"I appreciate your offer to help," Sam said. "I have no objection to your trying. But after meeting them, I don't hold out much hope for your success."

"Good, I will send a missive saying I would like to call on them day after tomorrow. That will give you time to meet with Mr. Abernathy. I won't mention Edward. We'll let that be a surprise."

She gave him a pretty smile and all Edward wanted to do was kiss her perfect lips. "It's getting late," he said, "and we seem to have all finished eating. Perhaps we should call it a day." He hoped to be able to get Dora all to himself soon. Perhaps if he took her father home first.

He stood and the others did as well.

"I'll take Dora home with me," Tudor said, dashing Edward's hopes. "We have a few matters to discuss."

Disappointment registered on Dora's face as well.

Would he ever find some private time with her? It was beginning to look doubtful. Perhaps they should return to Barrington soon. The geologist might have his report on Mount Webster finished by now.

Everyone said goodnight and Tudor turned to leave.

As Dora started to follow behind her father, Edward took her hand for a moment. "Good night," he said softly.

"Good night," she replied in a silky voice. As she passed next to him, she deliberately let her shoulder brush across his chest and whispered, "Sweet dreams."

A delightful shiver raced through him. He was certain he would dream about her. And he couldn't wait for those dreams to come true. Yes, this would definitely be a very short courtship.

The next day, Edward took Dixon to Tudor's office and the law clerk recorded his deposition. Two other lawyers, colleagues of Tudor, and Edward witnessed the document.

Afterwards, Tudor gave Dixon his wig, a fine tricorne, and since they were about the same size his wool coat. He told Dixon, who seemed appreciative, to wear them as a disguise so he would be less likely to be spotted by one of Forbes' men. Then he shook Dixon's hand and told him he was free to go.

Edward took him to the dock and bought passage to Liverpool for two on a ship leaving the next day and then gave Dixon the pouch with the remaining gold coins.

"Who is going with you?" Edward asked.

"A lady friend I've grown fond of recently. She lives nearby.

When Forbes' man made me board that ship yesterday, I thought I'd never see her again. Now I can. I know you won't believe me, but I'd like to find another way to make a living, an honest way, and start a family. After I saw Sam's family in Kentucky, especially his boy Little John, I've wanted to change my way of life. I'm going to find work that makes me happy. Thanks to these tickets," Dixon said, holding them up, "I can start my life over."

"I wish you the best of luck, Mr. Dixon. And I thank you for how you helped my brother and his wife."

"That's the least I could do after the worry I put them through in Kentucky. I regret my actions there. Please tell your brother that I'm sorry," Dixon said, as he stowed the tickets and coins securely away in his waistcoat pockets. He looked up into Edward's eyes. "Tell him I'm sorry for *everything* this time."

"I'll tell him," he assured him. "Stay low until you've boarded the ship so you're not spotted by any of Forbes' men."

"I will. I intend to stay comfortably nestled in the bosom of my next wife this evening. Wait until she sees me in this." He gestured to the wig, hat, and coat. "Perhaps we'll be married at sea by the ship's captain!"

"God's speed on your voyage." Edward waved and left the man to find his bride to be. And a new future.

He returned to his carriage and asked the driver to take him back to the Bell In Hand. On the way there, Dixon's words 'start my life over' echoed through his head again and again.

When he reached the inn, he went straight to his room, needing some time alone to think. He would join Sam and Catherine later this evening for dinner. And tomorrow afternoon, as Dora already arranged, she and he would call upon Mr. and Mrs. Forbes.

He stretched out on the bed and stared at the ceiling for some time.

Then an epiphany, stronger than any other realization in his life, hit him with such force it took his breath away. He sat up and drew his shoulders back as his mind raced.

If a man like Dixon could start his life over, have a second chance, why couldn't he? Why couldn't he fall madly in love? Marry

again? Have more strong sons and beautiful daughters? Perhaps he needed to do *exactly* what Dixon was doing. Start over in a new place. Create new memories. Find a way to make a living that would not only provide financial success, but would be rewarding as well. Something that would make him happy.

As much as he loved it and would miss it, his old life was over. When it disappeared, he'd sunk into an awful abyss of grief and loneliness. It had taken a year for him to climb out of that deep chasm. He'd struggled upwards, inch by inch, day by day, until he finally clung to the edge of that black hole. But it was Dora who helped him to stand up and walk away from it.

To walk toward life, love, and laughter. He smiled at the thought.

Now, he had a chance for a new beginning. To build a new life. To create something even better. Something beautiful.

And he wanted it to be with Dora. He'd known her but a week, nevertheless it was sufficiently long enough for him to realize they were made for each other. He couldn't imagine his life without her now.

He would ask her to marry him! Tomorrow night.

He couldn't believe Dixon's simple, honest words held such significant meaning for him too. But they did.

## CHAPTER 22

Remington Forbes could never remember being more angry. “That bloody bastard is blackmailing me!” he shouted and clenched his fists.

George Abernathy replied smoothly, “It would be blackmail if they were extorting money or something of value from you. They simply want you to leave Captain Wyllie and Catherine alone.”

“She’s my daughter, why should I leave her alone?” he barked.

“If you hadn’t threatened Wyllie’s life, we might be able to do something about this. But you did and they now have proof. Tudor also implied you had something to do with Adams’ death on the Wilderness Trail.”

He started to respond but Abernathy stopped him.

“Don’t say anything. I don’t want to know,” he said. “Face it Remington, this is over.”

“It’s never over.”

“It better be,” Abernathy warned, “or your reputation in Boston will be ruined beyond repair. If this got out, not only would your status be lost, Alexa would never forgive you.”

“You need to find a way around this. That’s what I pay you for damn it!”

“What way? There’s nothing either one of us can do. You sent three men to Kentucky to strong arm Wyllie and it didn’t work. You even sought to have him killed and that didn’t work. And here in Boston, you tried to buy him off and that didn’t work. Face it, you’re not getting Catherine’s land in Kentucky or Wyllie’s mountain.”

Forbes crossed his arms in front of him and gnashed his teeth. He wasn’t going to accept defeat.

“You’re a smart man, Remington. Find another way to make



money. A legitimate legal way, for heaven's sake. You barely survived this fiasco with your reputation intact. You might not be as lucky the next time."

"I'll forget about the land in Kentucky, but not that mountain. It's the only way I can get out from under this crushing debt without selling off most of my businesses."

"There must be other mountains you can buy."

"There are, but not with the concentration of gold and potential profit to be found in Wyllie's mountain. I want that gold mine, George," he said, making his voice firm, final.

Abernathy sighed loudly.

"So we have to give up on the annulment," Forbes said, "or risk blackmail."

"I'm afraid Tudor figured out my ploy anyway. We could never prove Catherine couldn't think for herself. You saw her. She's too strong, too happy, and obviously loves her husband. If she'd come back from Kentucky confused, meek, and unsure if she'd done the right thing by marrying Wyllie, we might stand a chance of convincing a judge. But she's not the docile pampered young lady who left here. She's far stronger and sure of herself."

Forbes couldn't deny the truth of Abernathy's words. "I noticed the same thing myself. But her mother and I still think Wyllie married Catherine for her wealth. And Alexa wants her daughter back. My wife can be terribly stiff-necked. She has a will of iron when it comes to Catherine."

"You have to make Alexa understand. She can no longer coddle her daughter here in her nest. Catherine is a grown woman with a family of her own."

"And a fortune of her own," he said and shook his head.

"If only Alexa's parents had passed their fortunes on to her instead of their granddaughter Catherine," Abernathy pointed out.

"Indeed. In doing so, that old Earl has caused me a lot of trouble. I can't imagine why the old bastard bypassed Alexa."

Looking away, Abernathy remained silent, while Forbes considered his options. "George, have someone take a look at my

assets and recommend what could be easily liquidated. I'm going to need some ready cash to finance a gold mine."

"So you're not going to give up on a gold mine?" Abernathy asked.

"No, certainly not. I've sent my agent, John Appleton, up to the New Hampshire mountains again to find out what's going on. He'll get a report from the surveyor we bribed and report back to me."

Abernathy's forehead creased. "Why did you bribe him?"

"I wanted him to keep an eye on what's happening on Wyllie's mountain for me. I need to know who comes and goes. And, more importantly, I want him to tell us exactly what that geologist finds to determine if it agrees with the report I've received."

"I see. He's your informant then."

"Exactly. Now I need to get back to work. Goodbye, George."

After Abernathy left, Forbes sat behind his desk contemplating the great things that were in his immediate future. Abernathy would just have to watch him do exactly what the lawyer said he could not.

He reviewed his stack of mail. An envelope addressed to both Alexa and him, written in a fine hand, caught his attention. He opened it and read the note out loud.

*"Mr. and Mrs. Forbes, I respectfully request the kindness of a short visit with you tomorrow afternoon. As you know, Catherine and I have been friends for a long time. I am concerned about her. Unless I hear otherwise from you, I will arrive around 5:00 tomorrow afternoon.*

*Most sincerely yours, Dora Tudor."*

Forbes reread the note. First her father tries to blackmail him and then his daughter has the audacity to want to speak with him? It was positively outrageous. But he was curious about what she might have to say. It could be used to his advantage.

He held the note in front of him, "All right, Dora, we'll meet with you."



Sam had warned Edward about the opulence of the Forbes home. However as their carriage drove up to the enormous mansion and he and Dora were admitted inside, he thought Sam's description had not prepared him sufficiently. The lavish wealth evident everywhere he looked made his own home look positively commonplace.

"Have you ever seen such luxury?" he whispered to Dora after they were shown into the parlor.

"The sad irony is that they are poor in what really matters," she whispered back.

They stood when they heard footsteps approaching.

Forbes and his wife entered together, both dressed in richness. Embroidered golden suns embellished Forbes' flaming scarlet coat that came halfway down his sturdy legs. Mrs. Forbes wore an equally elaborate gown of brown and gold silk. Rings of sparkling gems covered most of the fingers on their delicate hands.

"Mr. and Mrs. Forbes, thank you for agreeing to see me today," Dora told them genially. Her eyes sparkled with eagerness. "Mr. Forbes, I believe you have already met Mr. Edward Wyllie. Mrs. Forbes may I present Mr. Wyllie, Captain Sam's brother, and my friend."

"A great pleasure to meet you Madame," Edward told her and bowed his head. "I see now where Catherine gets her elegance."

Under high and rounded brows, her proud eyes regarded him coolly, but the corner of her mouth turned up a bit.

"What's the meaning of this?" Forbes asked him immediately, without shaking Edward's outstretched hand. "We agreed to meet with Dora, not you."

"Sir," he began.

Forbes stopped him. "I believe the last time I encountered you, you called me a cruel bastard," he growled.

"I did, Sir," Edward agreed, "but only because you ignored my nephew—your grandson."

"You insolent cur," Forbes snapped, his tone full of loathing.

This was not going well. It had been a mistake for him to come.

But he didn't want Dora to face Forbes alone. He didn't trust the man. "Mr. Forbes, we have come here to try to help."

"I don't need or want your so called help. Go back to New Hampshire you impudent ass and take that leech brother of yours back with you."

"You two can call each other names later. Shall we sit down," Mrs. Forbes urged, her tone commanding. "I want to learn why Dora is concerned about Catherine." She sauntered to an ornate chair, sat, and grandly arranged her impressive skirt over it.

Forbes flopped into an overstuffed chair, groaning his displeasure.

Dora and he took a seat across from them.

Dora swallowed and folded her hands in her lap before she began. "Mr. and Mrs. Forbes, I came here today to see if I could help mend the rift between you and Catherine. Please allow me to say my piece and then you can ask me any questions you want or toss us both out."

"Very well," Mrs. Forbes told her. Cold dignity made her face a stony mask.

However, Forbes' scowl made his displeasure quite evident.

Dora took a deep breath and glanced at Edward.

He smiled at her, trying to bolster her courage.

"First, when I saw Catherine earlier this week, she appeared radiant. I've never seen her look more beautiful or happier. The reason is that she is in love. Deeply in love. Their handsome, strong, healthy son is a result of that love. Catherine is enormously proud of Rory and she desperately wants you to love your grandson. Why? Because she loves you too. We *all* want to share the wondrous things in our lives with those we love. If you don't accept Rory as your grandson, you will hurt her deeply. Can you do that to Catherine? Your only daughter?"

"But..." Mrs. Forbes began, clutching a handkerchief tightly in her hands.

"Please wait, I'm not finished yet. It is unfortunate that you two have not taken the opportunity to learn more about Captain Wyllie.

Edward has told me a great deal about him. The Captain is a courageous man who saved Catherine's life and protected her in a wilderness full of danger. In the war, Sam saved the lives of innumerable men and his bravery earned him the rank of Captain. After fighting countless battles, suffering grievous wounds, and barely surviving the horrors of war, he received a medal from George Washington."

Forbes' distinguished face had become even more brooding.

Dora ignored the man's ominous presence and continued. "When Captain Wyllie's brothers wanted to move to Kentucky, he protected all of them on their journey from native attacks and from thieves and murderers. His courage is unmatched, his valor is unrivaled, and his honor is unquestioned. His brave blood flows in the veins of your grandson. You dishonor that blood by denying your grandson a welcome in this fine home and in your hearts. Rory is your blood too. The child carries both Forbes and Wyllie blood. And if you ask me that is something for which you should be extraordinarily proud."

Edward wanted to hug Dora and kiss her right then and there. He nearly did, but Catherine's father shot to his feet.

"How dare you!" Forbes stepped closer to Dora and his eyes blazed down at her. "I've heard just about enough from you, you impertinent young lady."

Edward's fists clenched and he started to spring up, but Dora spoke up in a strong voice.

"Please, sit down, Mr. Forbes. I'm still not through." She raised her chin stubbornly and the color heightened on her rosy cheeks.

Forbes' eyes smoldered at her defiance, but after a stern glance from Alexa, he did sit down again.

Dora leaned forward in her chair. "Money is not everything, Mr. Forbes. And rank in society is not everything, Mrs. Forbes. What counts in this life is the goodness that you do with that money and position. Whether it's an enormous fortune or a small pittance, whether you are a society heiress or a scullery maid, our virtue comes from within us—not what's in our pockets. Virtue is measured by the goodness in our hearts, not our birthright or position in society."

With every sentence she uttered, Edward's admiration for Dora grew. This was a woman with a great mind *and* a great heart. Even

Mrs. Forbes seemed to be listening intently to Dora's passionate words.

Dora took a breath and continued, unabated, "Mrs. Forbes. So many of the young ladies of Boston, including me, have admired you from afar. You have so much that you could share with us. Clearly Catherine inherited some of your admirable strengths."

Edward noticed Mrs. Forbes eyes soften for the first time.

"And she inherited your enterprising spirit, Mr. Forbes. Because of the strengths she learned from you two, she had the courage to go on to Kentucky, find her land, and start a new life," Dora told them. "You should applaud her courage and admire her for it, as I do. Few women have shown that kind of pluck and mettle. It's the kind of courage that will help build our new United States—a willingness to face the unknown, to sacrifice everything, for the sake of building our country. That willingness will power us forward as a nation. It is a power that will not be denied."

Forbes' stern features hardened with contempt. "Money is the only real power. And real men strive for power. They get that power through wealth."

Mr. Forbes seemed to have missed Dora's point entirely—that it takes a special kind of courage to face the frontier. The kind of courage that didn't come from wealth or fortune.

"Tens of thousands of men go west and stay poor. I say get rich here!" Forbes said. "I tried to stop Catherine's first husband from going to Kentucky, and taking her, but he wouldn't listen. I could have hired someone to go set up the lumber mill we planned. He should have listened to me." Anger swept across Forbes' face and the man lowered his gaze.

Edward would bet money that Forbes had ordered Adams killed.

He also thought Catherine's first husband must have wanted to take himself and Catherine as far away from Mr. and Mrs. Forbes as he could. If so, he couldn't blame the man one bit.

Dora let out a heavy sigh. "Mr. Forbes, will you at least admit that you have been wrong about Captain Wyllie? About your grandson?" she asked, her voice beseeching.

Denial flew from Forbes as he shot up from his chair. "No! I'm

right about that buckskin-wearing uncivilized knife fighter.”

Edward slowly rose to his feet and struggled to control the wrath exploding within him as he told Forbes, “The worth of a man has nothing to do with what he wears or his choice of weapons. My brother is a man of principle who has more honor and nobility in his little finger than all of Boston’s so called upper sort put together!”

Forbes’ mouth twisted and he swore. “I want no part of him *or* his son.”

Edward’s anger turned into contempt. “The world is full of men who think they are right when they are not. A man shows real strength, and takes the pathway to true honor, when he will admit when he is wrong. And you are wrong about my brother, Mr. Forbes. I urge you to reconsider.”

“I will not!” Forbes insisted.

“Please think again about this, for Catherine’s sake,” he told him.

“Leave my home! We’re done here. I will never reconsider. My mind is made up!” Forbes turned and left, his footsteps thundering out of the room.

As Forbes departed, Edward slowly shook his head. “Then I fear you will pay dearly for it.”

## CHAPTER 23

Dora stared out the carriage window, and sighed deeply, as they drove away from the Forbes mansion with a dazzling sun setting in the west. Did Forbes just extinguish the last rays of hope for his redemption? The disturbing thought distressed her.

“I know you’re disappointed,” Edward told her. “It’s a shame we couldn’t get through to that pig-headed man. I think his morality has passed to the other side of a deep chasm. And he does not possess sufficient virtue to make the leap back across.”

“You may be right. Although I think I might have reached Mrs. Forbes. Maybe only a smidgen, but enough to give me hope.”

“Yes. Her hard eyes softened more and more the longer you spoke.”

“I hope so,” Dora said. “It would mean so much to Catherine.”

“If your heartfelt words didn’t touch those two, then they can’t be reached. It would take Christ himself to have spoken more eloquently or passionately.”

“Thank you, Edward. I wanted so much to help fix the situation.”

“Sometimes situations can’t be fixed. People are who they are and can’t be changed no matter how hard we try.”

“But it saddens me, for Catherine’s sake.”

“Well. It won’t do to have you be sad especially when I finally have you all to myself. Where do you want to dine this evening?” He put his hand to her waist and drew her closer to him.

His devastating smile instantly lightened the burden weighing on her heart. She took hold of his hand. “How about the Green Dragon Tavern? Have you eaten there before?”

“No, I have not. Wherever you’d like to go is all right with me.”



“It’s a quiet eatery in a fine house on the North End. The Sons of Liberty met there to plan the Boston Tea Party.”

“The green dragon must have roared that night,” Edward chuckled.

“And breathed fire into their plan because the Tea Party certainly ignited a war.”

“Do they have oysters?” he asked.

“Of course. The whole city is enveloped in an oyster craze.”

Edward stuck his head out of the coach’s window and called up to the driver, “The Green Dragon Tavern, please.”

“So, does this mean you are officially wooing me?” she asked when he sat down again.

“No, this does.” He tugged her even closer and kissed her. His soft mouth lingered tenderly.

The delicious sensation made her stomach begin its now familiar flutter. Then the feeling spread downward and became more of a pulsing tremble.

“Then what does *this* mean?” she breathed, and she gave free rein to her lips, greedily claiming his mouth. Shocked at her own eagerness, she couldn’t seem to stop herself.

He groaned with pleasure and ran his hand up and down her back as she continued to kiss him. She wanted nothing more than to continue kissing him.

For the first time in her life, she understood what love was supposed to be like. She needed Edward—craved his presence, his touch, and his arms around her. But it was far more than a physical need. Most of all, she wanted his love. Her heart needed him just as surely as it needed to beat to keep her alive.

When they started down a noisy busy street she reluctantly pulled back. It wouldn’t do to be seen kissing in the back of a carriage. She withdrew her handkerchief from her reticule, dried her lips, smoothed her hair, and straightened the pale gold skirt of one of her favorite gowns.

As they sat next to each other, shoulder to shoulder, Edward’s

hand roamed up and down her leg.

His behavior was scandalous and she should stop him, but she couldn't and that was even more shocking. The wicked sensation made her want to tug her skirt up and allow him free access to her bare thigh. If this kept up, she would have to insist on an escort everywhere they went. Chaperones were typically only mandatory for maidens, not widows, but she was beginning to doubt the wisdom of that custom. Clearly she was appallingly incapable of resisting his charms. She would just have to exhibit more self-control from now on.

The carriage driver soon tugged his horses to a stop in front of the famous eatery.

Edward paid and thanked the fellow.

As they entered, a man greeted them at the tavern's door.

"A table for two please. In a quiet spot if you have one," Edward requested.

The man gave Dora a glance and told him, "I understand, Sir."

He took them to a pleasant candle-lit table, covered in a clean white cloth, nestled in a corner. Two rose buds, one pink and one red, rested in a little crystal vase and graced the table as only roses can.

"Will this table do?" Edward asked her.

"It's perfect."

Edward gave the young man a coin and then pulled the chair out for her.

The rest of the eatery hummed with conversations kept at a low level. The place was far more peaceful than the raucous atmosphere at the Bell In Hand. At last, they were going to have their romantic dinner.

"I love this place," he told her. "Let's order a bottle of wine to have before dinner."

"Splendid idea," she replied. "It will give us a chance to talk." Sitting across from her, dressed in a fashionable closely cut coat, he looked so attractive she couldn't stop herself from wondering what he would look like without the jacket, starched shirt, and cravat. The tailored fit of the coat's shoulders and sleeves, accentuated his broad

chest, flat belly, and well-muscle arms that she was certain would be rock hard.

To stop herself from staring with longing at him, she studied the candle on their table. Soft rays of light spread out from the halo. Edward had illuminated her life in much the same way as the candle lit their table. Soft rays of what she was sure was love spread out from his heart, lighting up her life as never before.

As soon as the wine arrived and the waiter filled their glasses, Edward reached for her hand. "You were so brave today, the way you stood up to Forbes."

"You gave me the courage I needed."

"I doubt that. I think you could stand up to the English crown if you had to."

She chuckled. "I guess I have more than a little bit of my father in me."

"It's more than that. I admire your loyalty to your friend and your willingness to help Catherine. And your words moved me. Especially what you said about the courage it took for Catherine to face the frontier. And how valiant people like Sam and Catherine will help our new country to grow."

"They will. Without people like them, and your other brothers, we would have stayed thirteen colonies forever. Now we have sixteen! Who knows how many states are possible."

"You would make an excellent writer. You are remarkably well-spoken and your words obviously came from your heart."

"They did. I needed to get that off my chest, even if it didn't work."

"Sadly, I predict Forbes will not be affected by what you told him," Edward said.

"Unfortunately, I agree. I dread telling Catherine when we meet with them for breakfast tomorrow morning. I'm afraid her father at least is never coming down from that pedestal."

He nodded and then peered at her intently. "Not to minimize the gravity of the situation, but I have an idea. Let's pledge not to discuss Mr. and Mrs. Forbes. The rest of the evening belongs to us."

She raised her glass. "Here, here."

"Here's to *you*, Dora. The most beautiful, courageous, and eloquent woman I have ever met."

"Then we are well suited," she said, remembering the first time he reached for her hand. "Because you are the most handsome, most brave, and most gallant man I have ever known."

"We do seem well suited, don't we?"

"No other man has ever made me feel like this."

"Like what?" he asked with a teasing smile.

She felt a blush rising up her neck and her heart thundered within her chest. "Like..." she stopped for a moment to collect her thoughts. "As though together we have built a bridge between us that is both beautiful and unbreakable. We are both on it and moving toward the middle. And I can't wait to reach you."

Edward seemed to grow thoughtful. "I..." he stopped and took a sip of his wine.

"Yes?"

"I know we have only known one another for a short time, but I feel as though I've known you all my life. And I can't imagine the rest of my life without you."

"I can't imagine even a few days without you. I dread your returning to Barrington. I know you will need to leave soon."

"Dora, I think we met in that cemetery in Barrington for a reason."

"I agree."

"And God must have spared our lives on that mountain for a reason. The reason is that we are meant to be together. I found my heart again upon that mountain. I think I knew it the instant I kissed you on the edge of that cliff. Wyllie Mountain not only gave us back our lives, it gave us love too."

Dora couldn't deny the truth in his words. She felt the same.

She loved this man.

He reached for her other hand and gently squeezed both of them. "If I delay much longer, I fear I will break my promise to your father. Not being able to love you as you should be loved—thoroughly and passionately—is almost unbearable. You are simply too irresistible. I admit it. My need for you threatens to override every ounce of restraint I have." His eyes blazed bright with longing and his strong jaw clenched with raw need that begged for release.

His bold look caused heat to flush her face, but mesmerized, she couldn't tear her gaze from his. Never had a man looked at her so. She wanted to gaze into those gorgeous eyes forever. She wanted to hold his warm gentle hands evermore. She wanted to kiss him ceaselessly.

Clearly, her own restraint was also weakening. Her longing for him became palpable and his need joined hers until the space between them nearly crackled with desire. The flames of passion burned bright within both of them this night. Could they keep this firestorm from raging out of control?

"Edward, what are you saying? What do you want?" Surely he did not expect.... No, he wasn't that kind of man. His intensions were honorable. She was sure of it. But that meant...

If her heart beat any faster, she was sure she would swoon. Her skin prickled and her limbs quivered as a shiver raced through her at the prospect of what he might be about to say. Then her eyes widened as he spoke.

"I'm saying I want to marry you." His smile was as intimate as a loving kiss.

"Edward!"

"I want to marry you and soon."

Before she could reply, he spoke again.

"I know we may set a record for the shortest courtship in Boston's history, but..."

She couldn't help her small grin of amusement. "Especially since you agreed you were officially starting to woo me on the coach ride over here!"

"True," he admitted. "Perhaps we should amend that. Let's just say our official courtship started the moment I set eyes on you."

“Oh Edward...”

“And I want to look at you the rest of my life. And I want so much more too. I want to love you forever. I want to ravish your body and pleasure you until you reach the pinnacle of love’s mountain. I want to provide for you and protect you. I want to come home to you every night and dream with only you. I want you to bear and raise my sons and daughters. And then I want to grow old with you and experience undying love.”

He bent to one knee. The simple gesture carried so much significance to her. From her romantic novels, she knew the practice dated from chivalry when it was customary for a knight to bow to his mistress in a show of servitude. It meant he was offering himself to her wholeheartedly and without reservation, elevating her and giving her the choice to determine the future of their relationship.

“Will you, would you, consider marrying me?”

“No, I won’t need to consider it. Yes, I will marry you!” she nearly shouted, but she didn’t care who heard her. Her happiness chased away all her inhibitions and apparently all of his.

He stood, drew her to her feet, and kissed her until she was breathless.

## CHAPTER 24

Edward could hardly contain himself his joy was so great. After a thoroughly romantic dinner they walked under the stars and a quarter moon for several hours. Each time they passed under the darkness of a tree, he kissed her. When it grew late and the streets emptied of people, he'd hailed a carriage. On the way to Dora's home, he'd managed to curb the hot tides of passion that raged through him by talking about their future. He'd shared his thoughts that he wanted to start fresh somewhere and she seemed surprisingly receptive to the idea.

When their carriage stopped in front of her home, he got out to escort her to the door.

Dora gazed into his face and he expected her to say goodnight. But she didn't.

"Pay your driver and then come in," she said. She spun around and hastened up the brick walkway to her door, her hips swaying provocatively as she hurried.

He nearly threw some coins, far more than the customary fare, into the driver's outstretched hands.

"Thank you, Sir!" the man responded. "God bless ye!"

Edward raced up the walkway and pushed on the door she'd left ajar. He closed it quietly and locked it and then glanced around, looking for Dora. She was nowhere to be seen. He wandered a bit into the parlor expecting to see her in the moonlight spilling into the room. "Dora, where are you?" he called softly, not wanting to wake the servants.

"Up here," she whispered from the top of the stairs. She hooked her index finger and motioned him up.

He fairly flew up the tall mahogany staircase and came to an abrupt stop on the landing in front of a narrow table that held a vase

full of pink tulips. A beautifully framed mirror hung above the table. He checked his appearance and ran his fingers through his tousled hair. He snatched up a tulip, nearly toppling the vase over in his haste. He caught it and in the process knocked a book off the table. Why was he so clumsy tonight? After setting everything right, he peered down the hall. From the crack of a slightly opened door, he spotted a band of light spilling onto the thick hallway rug.

Holding the flower behind his back, he tapped lightly on the door with his knuckle.

“Come in,” she called.

The sight before him made every muscle in his body grow hard. She stood poised near a blazing hearth, one hand resting on its mantel, clad only in her shift. Her gold silk taffeta gown lay puddled at her feet. The great puffs of the gown’s billowing fabric indicated it had likely just landed on the floor. The fire’s light made the gossamer fabric of her shift nearly transparent. He could swear the goddess Venus stood before him, standing on a puffy golden cloud.

He strode to her, bent to pick up the gown, and held her hand as her slipper clad feet stepped gracefully out of it. He laid the gorgeous garment on a chaise lounge and then stepped back until he stood in front of her. Gazing into her blushing upturned face, he tugged at the draw string of her shift until the fabric parted and exposed her lovely pale chest. He drew the petals of the tulip slowly down her cleavage and she heaved in a sharp breath. He started to brush the petals across her hardened nipples as well, but stopped himself.

“Are you certain about this?” he asked. He would not take this even the tiniest bit further without knowing she wanted all of him.

She wrapped her fingers around his hand that gripped the flower. “Yes, I’m sure.”

*But was he sure?* Her father’s trusting face filled his mind. He paused to reflect a moment and then quickly made his decision. “I’ve never wanted anything more in my life,” he told her. “But...”

“But what? I thought you found me desirable?”

Edward took a few steps away from her and chuckled. “You are more desirable to me than the air I breathe. I would give all that I own to bed you right now.”



“Then what is it?”

“Just, today, I spoke to Forbes about honor and principles. What kind of a hypocrite would I be if I couldn’t make it through the rest of the day without dishonoring myself? I find that, as much as I want to love you tonight, I cannot violate my promise to your father. A man of honor keeps his word.”

“Edward! We’re going to be married. It doesn’t matter now.”

“It does to me.”

“Father will understand.”

“Perhaps. But I won’t. I will not have our relationship start out on a lie. I promised your father. I mean to keep that promise. Good night, Dora.” He turned and forced his legs to move toward the door.

Behind him he heard her softly call his name and it broke his heart. “Have a carriage bring you to the Bell In Hand in the morning around 9:00.”

“Edward, I love you. You don’t have to leave,” she pleaded. “I want to love you. I want you to love me.”

With a lowered head, he kept his back to her. “No, not yet. I love you. But I won’t dishonor you.”

He exited her room before his soul clutching desire for her could change his mind. He hurried down the stairs, away from the greatest temptation of his life.

He needed to solve this situation and soon.

There was only one thing to do. Go see Dora’s father. Edward ran to the main thoroughfare to hail a carriage. At this late hour, he knew it would be difficult to locate one. Just as he was about to give up on finding a carriage and take off on foot, he spotted one in front of a busy tavern waiting for its tipsy patrons to emerge. “Take me to Court Street please, near Bowdoin Square, the home of Mr. Tudor.”

As he recovered his breath in the carriage, he planned what he would tell her father. He needed to choose his words cautiously.

When he arrived, he ran up the walkway and pounded on the door. Everyone would likely be asleep and might not hear him unless he battered the door. “Mr. Tudor, Mr. Tudor!” Edward yelled.

The same servant who had admitted him before came to the door in his night shirt. He held up the remnants of a sputtering candle and when he glimpsed Edward's face, the man's eyes rolled. "You again. Do you realize what hour it is, Sir?"

"Yes, please tell Mr. Tudor I need to see him urgently."

"Come in Mr. Wyllie and please wait in the parlor. I shall light a candle for you and then inform Mr. Tudor of your arrival."

Edward paced the dimly lit room for a few minutes before Dora's father appeared dressed in a brown velvet robe. His wiry gray hair stuck out in several directions and he seemed terribly sleepy.

"You do know that you are free to visit my home and call upon me during daylight hours?" Tudor asked. "This is beginning to become a habit of yours." He rubbed his eyes and sat down in what appeared to be his favorite chair. The small round table next to it held a pipe, a book of poetry, and a pewter candlestick.

"Sir, I apologize profoundly for waking you, and coming at this late hour, but this matter could not wait another day. I should have waited and asked your permission, but this evening, I asked your daughter to marry me."

"I was expecting that, just not this soon. It was only a few days ago that you asked permission to court her. Did she say yes?"

"She did indeed, Sir, and made me the most fortunate man in the world."

"Then why couldn't this happy news wait until the morning?"

"Here's my dilemma. If Dora and I don't marry right away and I continue to court her for weeks or months, I fear I will not be able to keep my promise to you. I am drawn to her so strongly that I feel like I am losing control. As a man, perhaps you can understand that. I didn't feel this way with my first wife. I was in complete control at all times. But I'm not now. I readily admit it. When I'm with Dora, my stomach churns with excitement, my heart hammers within me, my blood surges ..."

Tudor's hand shot up stopping him. "I get the picture."

Edward cringed, he'd gotten carried away. He just wanted Tudor to understand the depth of his feelings, his love, for Dora. His strong desire for her was an undeniable fact and it had caused him to become

overly fervent and descriptive. And he should not have come at an indecent hour and woke him. Would Tudor now withhold his permission? It was a stupid blunder.

“I apologize for my brashness, Sir. I just wanted you to understand that my feelings are not trifling. They are stronger than any I have experienced in my life. And the last thing I want to do is dishonor the pledge I made to you to behave as a gentleman. I value your opinion of me too much and I certainly do not want to risk losing your respect or your friendship.”

Tudor leaned forward, rested his arms on his legs, and folded his hands together. “I value our relationship as well. But what is it that you need to hear from me tonight?”

“Sir, I know this has all happened quickly, but I am certain it is our destiny to be with each other. With your permission, I would like to wed Dora tomorrow. We could have a celebratory meal with you and my family, and then leave for Barrington the next day.”

“Well, you are certainly an honest and honorable man. Most men would have compromised my daughter and then apologized or lied about it.”

He waited holding his breath until Tudor spoke again.

“However, I knew from the moment we met that you are not like most men, Edward. You are a principled man of honor.”

“Thank you, Sir.”

“And my daughter is not like most women. She has an excellent mind and a high degree of intellectual curiosity. If you were to marry, she must be allowed to continue to cultivate her keen mind.”

“I agree completely, Mr. Tudor. From the outset, I have been impressed by Dora’s intellect.”

Tudor’s head bent and he remained quiet, appearing to consider Edward’s plea. When he looked up, he asked, “Why the urgency? Why must you marry tomorrow?”

Edward stepped over to the mantel clock. It was not quite tomorrow. “The reason is that I have been away from my stores for almost a week. I must get back, but I cannot make myself leave without Dora. I don’t want to be separated from her for even a few hours, much less days. I want her beside me, but only as my wife.”

“Won’t she want more time to plan a wedding?”

“We talked about it tonight. Since we have both been married before, we want only a simple ceremony.” Edward’s mind swirled with uneasiness. Was her father going to give his permission for them to marry or not? While Tudor weighed his answers, he tried to mask his inner turmoil by straightening his shoulders and holding his head high.

Finally, Tudor looked up and then stood. “Welcome to my family, son.” He held out a hand and placed the other on Edward’s back in an affectionate hug.

“Thank you, Sir.” He let out the breath he’d been holding and swallowed his emotions as he hugged Tudor back. He was going to enjoy having this kind loving man as his father-in-law. Perhaps Dora’s father would fill some of the void left by his own father’s death.

“We can work out the details later,” Tudor said. “For now, we just need to get some sleep. Would you like to stay here for what’s left of the night? You would find it difficult to locate a carriage at this time. And it will give us time to talk in the morning.”

“That’s kind of you, Sir. Your hospitality would be most welcome. I’ll make you another pledge. That no man could love and will love your daughter more than I.”

“I’m certain that’s true. She is a beauty, inside and out. You’re indeed a lucky man, Edward.”

“No, Sir. I’m blessed.”

## CHAPTER 25

There was never a more beautiful bride. Edward was sure of it. As Dora came out the back of her father's house, her face lit up in a dazzling smile. Her hand rested upon her father's arm. Tudor was smiling nearly as broadly as Dora was and he looked extraordinarily proud.

Most of her glistening auburn hair was swept up, but a few long ringlets graced the sides of her face and the back of her long neck. She wore a lacey light pink shawl that matched the flowers she carried. As she drew closer, he was surprised to see that she wore the white dress she'd purchased in Barrington.

Then, it signified the end of her mourning period.

Now it signified a new beginning.

A new start for both of them. A ceremony that would bind them forever in love as well as in the eyes of God.

When he told Dora that her father had granted permission for them to be wed that day, she was so overjoyed she actually jumped for joy. Since they had no time to make other arrangements, she'd decided to marry in the back yard of her childhood home. The meticulously manicured gardens and flawless late spring day made a picture perfect backdrop for the ceremony. Tudor had managed to get their family's pastor to agree to come to his house for the 5:00 o'clock ceremony.

Tudor's servants and those from Dora's household had worked furiously all day to make everything perfect. A profusion of white and pink ribbons adorned doorways, the staircase railing, windows, and fireplaces. The celebratory dinner, complete with Boston cr me pie, would also be held there and would be served buffet style to allow everyone to socialize.

Earlier that morning at breakfast, Sam and Catherine could not have been happier to learn their exciting news. However, when Dora

told them later of Forbes' stubborn refusal to reconsider, Edward had glimpsed distress in Catherine's eyes. But Catherine quickly composed herself and offered to help Dora get ready for the wedding.

He had spent the rest of the day with Sam. Their first task was to get wedding attire for him, Sam, and Rory. They took the babe with them so that they would get the right size for Rory. It also allowed Catherine to focus on helping Dora for a few hours.

After some convincing, Sam finally relented and agreed to let Edward buy him some fashionable clothing. Sam said he was only doing it for Dora's sake and as soon as the wedding was over, the garments were coming off.

They were forced to visit several shops before they finally found ready-made breeches long enough for Sam's legs and nice enough for a wedding. Then they found a jeweler and Edward bought a heavy gold ring and asked the man to engrave the inside with their initials and the date of their wedding.

Although he declined Sam's jesting offer to let him change Rory's cloth, throughout their shopping excursion they took turns holding and entertaining the babe. Rory seemed to possess equal amounts of Sam's heartiness and Catherine's charm. It made Edward look forward to having a son again.

When Rory finally grew hungry and started to fuss, they had hastened back to Dora's home to turn the babe over to Catherine. Then they went to prepare themselves at the inn before hurrying back to Mr. Tudor's home again. The day had flown by in a whirlwind of activity.

At last, the ceremony was beginning and Sam stood next to Edward. Despite how ill at ease his brother seemed to be in his new attire, Edward could tell that Sam was happy for him.

"I'm delighted you are marrying Dora," Sam whispered. His brother had always been able to read his thoughts and today was no exception.

"Me too," he whispered back.

The violinist Edward hired to perform at the ceremony began to play. A beautiful melody he didn't recognize sweetened the air around them. His heart filled with emotion as he listened to the musician's bow elegantly gliding across the strings. It was more than a piece of

music. Each note of the wondrous tune seemed to be played only for Dora and him.

With the afternoon sunlight bathing her beautiful face, she and her father made their way forward on the traditional carpet of blossoms to assure a happy path through life. He locked his eyes on hers.

Happiness sparkled from her eyes and her smile radiated pure joy. Her overwhelming beauty was made all the more so by the love she exuded. *She is the embodiment of the beauty of love.*

Enchanted, he could not take his eyes off of her.

“I love you,” she mouthed.

Unable to concentrate on anything but Dora, the ceremony flew by in a hazy blur, even when he placed the gold band on her finger. But when it came time to kiss his new wife, time stood still with a pinpoint focus. He savored every second, every heartbeat, as he laid his lips tenderly on hers for their first kiss as husband and wife.

“I love you,” she whispered against his lips. “I will always love you.”

“And I will always love you,” he promised.

“Even when I am terribly old and wrinkled?”

“Even then. You will always be beautiful.”

She answered with a joyful giggle.

He was going to love hearing that happy sound the rest of his life.

Then everyone applauded and surrounded them, hugging, kissing, and offering celebratory pats on the back and handshakes. It was all enjoyable, but privately his thoughts were elsewhere. He couldn’t wait until he would finally have Dora all to himself.

Before breakfast that morning, he had made a reservation for a room in the nicest inn in Boston—the Parker House, located on School Street on Beacon Hill. After enduring a couple of hours of socializing and eating food he didn’t want, he was ready for what he truly craved—his bride.

After a toast from Mr. Tudor and then another from Sam, they politely thanked everyone and made their way to their awaiting carriage drawn by four white horses whose manes were bedecked with flowers.

To the cheers of family and friends, Edward helped Dora climb inside, his ecstatic heart swelling with love for his bride.



They were still in high spirits when their carriage arrived at Parker House, an ornate five-story stone and brick structure faced in gleaming white marble. Her heart beating fast, Dora gazed up at the gracefully arched windows from the carriage. Because of its close proximity to her home, she'd seen the building go up as it was constructed. However, since the inn had opened during her mourning period, when her socializing was quite limited, she had not yet found an opportunity to visit the inside.

While the driver took their bags inside, Edward helped her down from the carriage and, as always, the touch of his warm hands gave her a sense of protection. Before she could take even one step, he embraced her and his mouth swooped down to capture hers. She reveled in the sweet pleasure of his kiss until, reluctantly, they parted a few inches.

“Your castle awaits, Mrs. Wyllie,” he said.

The fare for the carriage had already been taken care of so they waved goodbye to the driver who tipped his hat at them. Edward held her hand as he escorted her up the sidewalk to the marble steps that led to the main foyer.

“Should I carry you over the threshold?” he asked.

She stopped and turned toward him. “Not here, you silly goose. You can carry me into our room though.”

“Married for mere hours and you’re already calling me belittling names?” he teased, and then gave her one of his most charming smiles.

Thunderstruck by the masculine beauty of him, she paused to take in his good looks. His dark hair gleamed in the light of the entrance lanterns and framed his proud face. He stood there, powerful



and roguishly handsome, gazing down at her with unveiled desire. The fine fabric of his elegant new coat showed off his broad shoulders. He had dressed impeccably for the wedding and she'd noticed that every woman at the ceremony could hardly take her eyes off of him. She couldn't blame them—he was resplendent and a treat to admire.

“Shall we Mrs. Wyllie?” He took her elbow and led her inside.

While he secured the key to their room, she admired the Parker's interior. Thick carpets, fashionable divans, and oversized chairs provided an air of sumptuous elegance and charm. The lobby was decorated in rich hues with oak walls and burnished decorative bronze. Crystal chandeliers glowed above them, as guests spoke quietly to one another in little enclaves in the spacious lobby.

She gazed in awe at the most elegant and romantic place she'd ever visited. It made her glad that Edward was here with her to share the first time she'd seen it. She knew that no matter where their destiny took them, her memory of this one night in this one place, would stay with her the rest of her life.

“We are now the proud holders of the honeymoon suite on the third floor,” Edward told her. “Our bags will be brought up shortly.”

“How long are we staying?” she asked as she started up the stairs.

“I regret to say just one night. I've been gone too long already. My employees need to be paid and my stores will be depleted of essentials that I'll need to reorder. But after that, I am all yours for a week.”

“No! You're mine for decades, Edward Wyllie. And don't you forget it.”

As they made their way up the elegant staircase hand in hand, chandelier light glimmered over his face with a warm radiance. But it was the sparkle in his smile that made a pleasurable heat spread through her.

“Ah, here we are at long last. Your room, my lady.” He effortlessly whisked her into his strong arms.

“You should have unlocked the door first,” she pointed out.

“Your wisdom often astounds me,” he said, with a self-conscious grin. He sat her down again, unlocked the door, and pocketed the key.

Then he grabbed the door handle and nearly threw the door open, stopping it just in time before it banged against the wall. "Once again, your quarters await you, my lady. Shall I carry you in the traditional way or throw you over my shoulders like a plundered prize?"

"The traditional way will do. Unless, my conquering Lord, you would consider a third way." She was going to enjoy this.

"And what, pray tell, might this third alternative involve?" he asked, sounding more than a little intrigued.

She glanced around them to be sure they were alone and no one was coming up the stairs. Then she reached up and hooked her arms around his neck. Kissing him, she lifted a leg and swung it up, followed by the other leg, and wrapped them both around his hips.

He gripped her bottom in his hands. "I like this third alternative," he said and quickly carried her in. "You are both creative and persuasive."

She giggled, delighting in his approval. "You'd best set me down and recover yourself before the man with our bags arrives."

"Quite so." He deposited her on the enormous bed, covered in luxurious linens, in the center of the large elegant room. "Let me just inspect this room for you my lady," he said and began moving about.

"I'm sure it will meet even your high standards," she told him. She was particular herself sometimes, especially about such things as cleanliness and tidiness. She didn't mind getting her hands dirty when necessary, but at the end of the day, she wanted soap and a clean towel and everything in order.

Within moments, their bags arrived and Edward gave the young man a coin as he thanked him and shut the door.

"Shall I set this somewhere for you?" he asked, holding up her bag.

"Drop it and come here."

He couldn't get his clothes off or hers fast enough. When she tried to help, her fingers just seemed to get in the way so she let him take control. At last, in one final motion, they both stood there unclothed.

His body was every bit as magnificent as she had imagined. She

could not stop looking at him despite how her heart leapt and her knees weakened.

Then, as he gazed upon her for several long moments, she could actually feel the caress of his eyes. His hands could not have explored her form more sensually. The effect was thrilling and her body responded just as eagerly as if he'd actually touched her. Her heart raced, her breasts tingled, and her desire heightened.

He stepped to her and locked his arms around her in a firm embrace. Their bare skin met for the first time and the exquisite sensation made every inch of her flesh revel in the feeling.

His passion now unbridled and galloping free, he kissed her with such astounding ardor that it left her breathless and melting into his embrace.

They soon tumbled into the bed, impatient to be in each other's arms. She settled back into the soft mattress and buried her hands in his thick hair as he snuggled closer, his breath warm against her neck.

Her heart raced while he gazed lovingly into her eyes and slowly traced a fingertip across her lower lip. Then the same fingertip trailed a path down her chin and neck as he began his slow exploration of her body. When he reached her breasts she arched instinctively toward him. The light touch sent warmth rolling through her like soft ripples on water. Then his big hand flowed down, lightly passing over her hips. He clutched the curves of her bottom with his splayed fingers and tugged her even closer.

As he kissed her, his hand moved to her womanhood and she moaned with need. His tender massage made the gentle ripples become rolling swells. The swells soon became waves breaking through her again and again. Each time higher and harder, until a surge hit her with such force it threatened to carry her mind away to some distant place. Suddenly, it made landfall, on the shore of his love. He'd magically brought her to paradise, leaving only a warm mist to settle over her languid body.

When she could breathe again, she turned her attention to him, letting her fingers travel all over him, exploring, discovering. She relished the feel of his skin, soft and smooth in places, hard in others, but always hot against her touch. At last she could give free rein to her deepest desires and love him unabashedly. Emboldened by how much he seemed to enjoy her touch, she journeyed farther and further wanting to learn all of him.

But he was too impatient to let her explore for long. With a call of her name, whispered on his lips, Edward raised above her.

It was time to finally and truly become husband and wife. In that wondrous moment their two souls became one.

And her life changed forever.

She now understood what made being with Edward so astonishingly different—it was love.

Miraculous, forever, love.

## CHAPTER 26

*A week later, Wyllie Mountain, New Hampshire*

Edward rose early, too chilly and uncomfortable in the scientists' tent to sleep late. He missed Dora's warm body lying next to him. He'd already grown used to waking to her beautiful face.

After he and Dora had enjoyed seven days and seven passion filled nights together, Sam and Catherine had arrived. Sam told him at the wedding that he wanted to visit Wyllie Mountain, but his brother promised Edward a week alone with his new bride before they would arrive. And, as promised, seven days after the wedding, Sam, Catherine, and Rory joined them in Barrington. They'd ridden a prize stallion and a blooded mare, which Sam had purchased earlier that week. Rory rode, cushioned on a soft blanket, strapped to the front of Sam. The babe already seemed to love riding and was destined to become a fine horseman according to Catherine.

Two days later, Edward and Sam left Dora, Catherine, and Rory safely ensconced at his home. The two women planned to buy the remaining items Catherine needed to purchase before returning to Kentucky, including larger clothes for Little John. Catherine said he grew taller every month and by the time they got back, he would likely be at least an inch taller than when they left for Boston.

Sam left the two new thoroughbreds stalled in Edward's stable since Sam preferred not to take the valuable mounts into the mountains where horses often suffered injuries. Edward had lent him one of his geldings for their trip up the foothills to Wyllie Mountain. When they arrived in Crawford Notch, they found the inn full so they were forced to sleep in the scientists' tent.

When Edward awoke, he wasn't surprised to see that Sam's pallet lay empty. His brother was an early riser. Sam must be planning his mine, Edward thought as he dressed.

They'd brought Thomas Reed, a highly recommended mine

operator, with them. Reed was starting to stir, but the surveyor and the geologist still slept soundly.

Edward exited the tent flap and spotted his brother. Sam stood there, motionless, his flintlock cocked at some hint of danger. Was it from beast or man? Sam's highly honed instincts would know.

He withdrew his pistol from his belt and quietly stepped over to stand next to Sam. "What is it?"

"Someone's been here," Sam whispered. "A man peeked inside our tent. But it was too dark for me to see who it was. I jumped up and grabbed my weapons, but he was already gone."

"Who do you think it was?" Edward asked.

"Someone who works for Forbes would be my guess."

"Then we had better be watchful and wary today."

"Agreed. I don't trust that man."



After hearing his agent John Appleton's report, Forbes had decided to go to the mountains himself. The surveyor had confirmed to Appleton that there was gold in Wyllie Mountain. Renner's geologic studies found that the other mountains in the area contained only trace amounts of gold. But on Wyllie Mountain, the geologist found gold in the bedrock in veins that stretched east to west rather than north to south. Renner had discovered the narrow rich streaks in sand and gravel deposits exposed in the sides of the ancient mountain's foothills.

Forbes rode his thoroughbred beside John Appleton as they approached the mountains. The sight of New Hampshire's majestic peaks and imposing foothills made visions of untold riches fill his head. He was determined to have this gold mine one way or another. With the precious mineral valued at more than two hundred dollars a pound, it would make him the richest man in Boston. And, if he could also get control of Catherine's wealth, including her profitable estate in England, he would be the richest man in the country. It was just a matter of time before he did.

He would be able to buy Alexa and Catherine anything they

wanted. He would shower Alexa with jewels worthy of a queen. And Catherine had always loved dressing in fine gowns while she enjoyed Boston's culture. That's what was important to his daughter, not the uncivilized frontier. Great things were in his daughter's future, she just didn't know it yet.

He just had to do something about Captain Wyllie.

Before he left, Alexa said she was planning to call upon Catherine at the inn and convince her to stay a few more days if she hadn't left already. That should give him enough time to see to things up here in the mountains.

"I have a man watching the scientists' tent," Appleton said.

"Who?" Forbes asked.

"He's a local from Crawford Notch, Mitchell Smith," Appleton replied. "He'll let me know if anyone else showed up at their campsite."

"When do you see Smith again?"

"He'll find us at the inn later today. I told him to keep checking the tavern there every afternoon until he spotted me."

"Good. We might need an extra man. Can he be trusted?" Forbes asked.

"As much as any of these types can. Men for hire whose profession is assisting others with nefarious plans are not the most trustworthy or loyal types."

"Understood. Keep a close watch on him," Forbes instructed. "We'll stay at the Crawford Notch Inn tonight and then the three of us will find Captain Wyllie tomorrow. I want to give him one more chance to make the right decision."

"And if he doesn't..."

Forbes nodded.



Edward and Sam intended to spend the morning with the mine operator, before the man returned home. After breakfast, the surveyor

told them there was nothing more he could do and he departed for Crawford Notch.

The geologist then showed the three of them the location of the strongest deposits and soil samples speckled with gold. Afterwards, he returned to the campsite to finish his written report.

“Mr. Reed, you come highly recommended as a mine operator,” Edward said.

Reed appeared pleased to hear that. “Thank you Mr. Wyllie. When the ore from other mines didn’t yield sufficient gold deposits, I thought I was going to have to scrape out a meager living mining other minerals. I appreciate your considering me to be your mine operator. I also have an excellent crew of men on standby, waiting for your brother’s go ahead. They’re all hardworking family men who live near here and would appreciate the work.”

Sam spoke up and crossed his arms in front of him. “I’m pleased to hear that, but I want a firm estimate on the cost of that crew and equipment, *before* we begin mining operations.”

“Of course, Mr. Wyllie,” Reed replied. “That’s what I always do for owners. But the anticipated yield will depend entirely on the accuracy of the geologist’s studies.”

“How often do you encounter difficulties?” Edward asked.

“Once we get the operation running, it nearly runs itself. It is typically a smooth process, although time consuming, it largely involves backbreaking, rock-breaking labor.”

“What’s involved in getting it running?” Sam probed.

“Along the lower half of the mountainside,” Reed said, pointing to the spot Renner identified, “we’ll create a tunnel, using picks and shovels, which will pass directly below where the geologist mapped the locations of the largest deposits.”

“How long will it take to dig the tunnel?” Edward asked.

“Depending on how hard the rock is, weeks or even months. But it’s important. That tunnel will be our haul road because it is carved into more solid material. Then, on both sides of the tunnel, we’ll make vertical shafts up into the mountain, with horizontal runs branching out at appropriate levels. We’ll use small ore carts that carry about a half cubic yard of rock to haul the ore out of the mine.”



Edward frowned. "But how will you get the rock from the shafts down to the tunneled haul road so that it can be dragged out?"

"Typically, we wheel the cart up to an ore chute and shovel the rocks and gravel that have been dug out of the upper levels into the chute. Then gravity takes over and the rock falls into the waiting cart."

"Then what?" Sam asked.

"The carts are wheeled outside so the materials can be processed by another crew and the gold recovered."

"Exactly how is that done?" Sam probed.

"By breaking up the rock with sledge hammers and removing the gold," Reed answered.

"That must be extraordinarily tedious and time consuming," Sam pointed out. "And a lot of the less significant flakes and pieces must be lost."

"It does eat up a lot of time. And yes, it's next to impossible to get all the ore out of the rocks," Reed confirmed. "When I'm not working, I make it a habit to spend my time trying to improve the methods we use in mining. If you're interested, I've recently come up with a new approach that I want to try. I believe it would yield a greater percentage of gold from the ore. I've drawn a sketch of my design if you'd like to see it."

"Indeed," Sam answered.

Reed hurried back to the tent to retrieve the diagram from his bag while Sam and Edward waited.

"He seems to know a great deal about mining," Edward said. "Do you think you'll want to use him?"

"I do. Thank you for locating the man. I think he'll make an excellent manager."

"Well, it took numerous inquiries this past week, but I finally found an operator with an excellent reputation. I'm glad he was available to come up here with us."

"I'm sorry to drag you away from Dora so soon after your wedding," Sam told him with a grin.

Edward chuckled. "It is a great sacrifice, I assure you. I intend to find some grand way for you to pay me back big brother."

Reed raced up to them, his face full of excitement, holding the document. "I've suggested this a couple of times, but I haven't yet found an owner willing to try it." Reed opened up a large sheet of parchment and pointed to his precisely drawn diagram. "This system entails building an upright axle with large spokes over a huge stationary box used to hold the raw rock. Several mules are hooked to the outside edge of the spoke and they drag it around and around. To the interior of the spokes, we tie chunks of granite, which the movement of the mules will drag over the ore. Granite is so hard, the process would crush the rock. After the rock is pulverized, we could use gold pans for final sorting."

"That's brilliant," Sam told Reed, and patted the man on the back. "I want you to manage our mine and build your contraption."

Reed smiled broadly. "Thank you, Mr. Wyllie. I believe this new system will speed up production substantially and make it more efficient. I appreciate your faith in me. I'll keep working on ways to improve this design even further."

"I want the mules treated well," Sam told him.

Reed shook his head in agreement. "There will be no whipping unless it's just a flick on their rump. Most mules are just not impressed with a whip and will take whatever pain you dole out."

"True," Sam agreed. "How do you keep them moving?"

"We could offer oats or chopped apples and every time we need a little more speed out of them, present the reward," Reed suggested.

"I would also give them leg and voice cues. If you treat them well, they won't mind working for you," Sam said.

"You seem to know a lot about animals," Reed told Sam.

"I own a horse farm back in Kentucky. And I'd sincerely like to get back to it. How long do you think it will be before you are fully operational?"

"Close to a year considering we won't be able to work in the winter here at all."

Sam nodded. "So this time next year, the mine will be in full

operation?”

“That’s my best estimate,” Reed replied. “There’s no need for you to remain here in New Hampshire. I can send you regular reports. You have my word that I will manage the mine as though you were here every day.”

“I can tell you’re a man who will honor his promise,” Sam said.

“How do you keep the men from stealing the gold?” Edward asked.

“We offer a substantial bonus, which you will pay Mr. Wyllie,” Reed explained, looking at Sam, “every three months, based entirely on the amount of gold mined. And, any miner caught stealing even a single nugget is tarred and feathered and then sent to the stocks for public humiliation. It’s standard practice among miners.”

“Your rules carry stiff penalties,” Edward said.

“It’s necessary. Gold can make men go crazy with greed.”

## CHAPTER 27

Before they started down the foothills of Wyllie Mountain, Sam checked the powder in his Kentucky long rifle and both of his high-caliber Revolutionary War officer's pistols. Although well-used, they still looked to be in remarkably good condition.

Edward also checked the powder in his own flintlock, hoping neither one of them would need to use the weapons. As a businessman, he rarely needed a weapon and only carried one pistol. But growing up with Sam and his other brothers, he'd learned to use a weapon early and could hit anything he aimed at.

Edward eyed Sam. "Do you think we'll encounter trouble?" he asked. "Did you sense that we were being followed on the way up here?"

Sam slung the strap to his powder horn over his head. "No, I didn't. But I sense something now. Keep your eyes and ears open."

They started following the narrow trail down. Sam's instinct was nearly always right, so Edward found it hard to relax and enjoy the stunning scenery. Instead, his thoughts were disquieting and disturbing. The narrow trail would be a prime spot for an ambush if Forbes dared to hire someone again to kill Sam. He wouldn't put it past the conniving man. His misgiving increased by the minute the further they descended. He couldn't let anything happen to Sam. His brother had two sons to raise and a wife who loved him dearly. Determined to keep Sam safe, his muscles tightened in readiness and his mind stayed focused on watching for threats.

After they finally reached the lower elevation, he could tell Sam had a much stronger guard up. His brother sat his horse with his back rigid and his hand resting on his knife.

Edward kept glancing uneasily over his shoulder, knowing that Sam was keeping a keen eye on what was in front of them.

He couldn't wait until they reached Crawford Notch. They

weren't far now.

Sam suddenly tugged on his horse's rein, bringing the mount to a gentle stop. As soon as Edward stopped too, his brother cocked his head, listening. Somewhere down the rocky path the sounds of horses could be heard.

Sam kept his hand poised on his big knife.

Edward pulled his pistol and stepped Longshanks closer to the gelding that Sam rode.

They sat their mounts, quiet and unmoving, as the sound of the horses grew closer. Edward guessed it was three mounts from the sound of the creaking saddle leathers and jangling tack.

Then, a moment later, three men emerged from the bend in the trail. Forbes and two others Edward didn't recognize rode toward them.

The sight of the three brought his senses fully awake, but since it was Catherine's father, both he and Sam sheathed their weapons.

Forbes trotted up to them and then jerked hard on the bit in his mount's mouth, stopping the horse abruptly in front of them.

Edward saw Sam frown at the animal's cruel treatment.

Forbes regarded Sam quizzically for a moment. "So, you've come to see about your gold mine, have you?"

"What I'm doing here is none of your business, Sir," Sam said with a hostile glare.

"Actually, what you do *is* my business. You stole my daughter and her fortune and then got her with that damn child," Forbes swore.

"How dare you refer to my nephew with such blasphemy?" Edward told Forbes.

Forbes glared at Sam. "Because that babe is ill-spawned!"

Sam gripped his big knife but did not withdraw it.

His brother's jaw hardened and Sam scowled at Forbes through lowered lids and squinted eyes. Like an ominous volcano on the verge of an eruption, red-hot rage boiled inside his brother just below the

surface.

Edward stepped his stallion closer. "Mr. Forbes, you are trespassing on Wyllie land. I would advise you to leave. Unless you're looking for trouble, because that's what you'll get."

"What I'll get is this mountain. I came up here to get you to sell it to me, Captain. If you do, I'll forget about trying to annul your marriage and let you and Catherine return to Kentucky in peace."

Edward heard a lie beneath that promise.

"My mountain is not for sale and never will be. The mountain will remain mine until my son Little John inherits this land someday," Sam told him.

It pleased Edward that Sam considered Little John his own son.

"So Catherine's son won't inherit," Forbes said. "Just another means for you to rob her."

"The only one who intends to rob her is you!" Edward barked.

Forbes ignored him and continued to glare at Sam. "Even if you manage to get a gold mine going here, you'll still be an uncouth barbarian, Captain," Forbes lashed out. "You will never be good enough for my daughter!"

Sam seemed to be exercising his uncanny ability to remain calm, but if Forbes pressed him much further, it wouldn't be long before Catherine's father suffered his brother's wrath.

"I do not need your approval, your esteemed opinion, or even your notice of my son," Sam snarled. "I do however, need you and your men to turn your mounts around and get off my land."

Forbes appeared anything but calm. The man's temper soared, made clear by his reddened face and bulging eyes. The other two men, still sitting on their horses, appeared to be growing more agitated as well.

"You took Catherine away from me, had your way with her, and then married her for her wealth. Admit it!" Forbes shouted with reckless vehemence.

"I'm warning you," Sam snarled, "leave and take your lies with you." Sam gripped the handle of his big blade so hard his knuckles

looked white, but he still did not withdraw it.

But Forbes' accusing voice stabbed at Sam again and again. "You're a penniless beggar, leeching off my daughter. How did you force her to marry you? Was she with child? Catherine would never have married you willingly! Never!"

"You had better stop now!" Edward warned, barely able to control his own anger.

Forbes lips thinned and his eyes flashed with fury as he screamed at Sam. "You raped my daughter!"

Sam surged forward on the gelding, headed for Forbes.

"Shoot him Appleton!" Forbes yelled.

One of the other two men raised his pistol and aimed his sight at Sam.

"No!" Edward cried. "Stop!" His plea echoed in the forest as the man's weapon fired. The shot's boom was the worst sound he'd ever heard.

Time stood still as Edward stared, horrified, in utter disbelief.

Sam's body made a loud thud as it struck the ground. The second worst sound he'd ever heard.

This couldn't be happening. Sam was the indestructible brother. Everyone's hero. His hero.

"You bloody bastard!" Edward cried. He withdrew his own pistol to shoot the man that had just fired on Sam.

At the same time, Forbes yanked out his pistol. Did the monster intend to finish Sam off if he wasn't dead already?

Edward heard the click of the flintlock's hammer as Forbes readied the firearm and wrenched his mount next to Sam.

Forbes' features distorted into an ugly glowering mask of frenzied rage as the crazed man glared down on Sam.

Instantly, Edward refocused his sights on Forbes and cocked his own weapon. "No don't!" he shouted. He didn't want to kill Catherine's father. "Put down your weapon!"

Forbes lowered the weapon, but only to take better aim at Sam who lay unmoving on the ground. The heartless bastard intended to shoot a helpless man—his own son-in-law.

Edward fired.

His aim was true. A sizeable hole, centered on Forbes' heart, began to leak blood over the man's costly waistcoat. Shock contorted Forbes' face before he slid sideways off his horse. He landed so close to Sam their legs touched.

Edward's eyes flashed to the man who just shot Sam.

With a sneer on his face, Appleton was hurriedly reloading his weapon. The other man with Forbes had already turned his mount and fled down the trail.

Edward didn't have enough time to reload his own flintlock so he hurdled off Longshanks and heaved one of Sam's pistols from his brother's belt.

As he rose, Appleton fired.

He pivoted sharply to avoid the ball roaring from the man's weapon.

Edward returned fire.

Appleton flew backwards off his horse, a lead ball embedded at the base of his throat. The man's startled mount lunged forward through the black powder's smoke, nearly running Edward over.

He barely leapt out of the way in time and felt the horse's stirrup slam against his hip as the mount flew by.

He stuck the still smoking weapon in his belt and dropped to his knees next to Sam. The sight before him made his heart stop. He gasped in horror. Blood covered the left side of Sam's head, soaking his hair and spilling down into his ear and onto his rugged face and neck.

"Oh Lord," he cried. With shaking hands, he tried to wipe blood out of his brother's eyes. "Please, no."

Frantic, he glanced down at Sam's chest. It still rose and fell slightly. "Thank you, God," Edward whispered aloud.



He had to get Sam to Crawford Notch where they would have a doctor, but first he needed to staunch the bleeding. He tore off his cravat and unwound the fabric. Fortunately, for their trip to the mountain, he'd chosen a plain cotton one to adorn his neck. He wound the fabric around Sam's head, gently applying pressure to the bleeding gash, and then tied it off. The wound seemed serious, but he was no doctor and didn't have the experience with wounds that Sam did from all his battles. Was his brother's skull fractured? Would he wake again?

Worry and fear raced through him as he quickly checked both of the other men. They were both dead.

"You bastard! You did this. Not me!" he shouted down at Forbes.

Breathless with rage, he returned to Sam's side and gently lifted his brother's bandaged head. "Sam? Sam, can you hear me? I need to get you on your horse."

But he got no response. After several tries, he decided Sam was incapable of staying on a mount. Even if he tied him to the gelding, Edward was afraid his brother would slip off. He wanted to keep Sam sitting up. Throwing him over the saddle would cause Sam's head to bounce around too much and would likely cause the wound to bleed even more.

His thoughts spun as he looked around frantically, trying to come up with a solution. He could build a litter. But Sam was badly injured and required care as soon as possible. And he needed to get his brother away from here soon—before the smell of all this blood lured a black bear or wolf from the woods. Or worse, a pack of wolves.

Longshanks would just have to carry them both. But how on earth was he going to lift Sam? His brother was bigger than he was. Then again, years of stacking shipments of crates heavily loaded with goods for his stores had put muscle on his arms and legs. Perhaps he could do this! Longshanks was trained well enough to stand still and the strong stallion was big enough to carry their combined weight. He just had to get Sam up on top of the horse's saddle.

Edward took a deep breath and then slid one arm under Sam's knees and the other under his shoulders. "God, give me the strength." He pushed his hips up, letting his legs bear the majority of the weight. With a herculean effort, he managed to get one of Sam's legs and hips over the saddle. Then he pushed his brother's slumping upper body up and mounted himself behind Sam. Longshanks shifted his own weight

trying to accommodate the heavy load of two big men.

He wrapped one of his arms around his brother's chest and let Sam's head fall back against his own right shoulder. Sam's head lolled toward Edward's neck and he could feel warm blood leak onto his own skin. "Stay with me Sam. I'm taking you for help."

He reached down and snatched up the reins of the waiting gelding and took off. They needed to hurry. He gave his mount a few nudges with his boots to hasten the stallion along. But the gravel and rock covered trail and the heavy load of two men forced Longshanks to descend slowly. They seemed to be moving at a crawling pace and Edward agonized at their slow progress.

The feel of Sam's breath against his chin gave him hope. "We're almost there," he kept saying as much to reassure himself as Sam.

Within the half hour, he pulled the stallion to a stop in front of the inn.

Several men standing outside hurried over to help. They gingerly pulled Sam off of Longshanks.

Edward leapt from the saddle. "My brother needs a doctor!"

"I'll run for Doc MacDonald," one man said and took off running.

"What happened?" one asked.

"He was shot, by one of Forbes' men."

"Who is Forbes?" another asked.

"A dead man," he told them, with a bitter taste in his mouth.

"I'll see to your mounts," another volunteered. "Do you want them stabled here?"

"Yes," Edward told him. "And fed and watered. Thank you."

The last two men assisted Edward as they hurriedly carried Sam to a room and got his brother laid out on a bed. When they finished, he told them, "Up on the trail leading to Wyllie Mountain, about a half hour from here, there are two dead men and their horses, if the mounts haven't run off. Have the sheriff or someone go get their bodies and bring them back here. One of them is related to my brother's wife."

“How’d they die? Were they shot too?” one asked.

Edward merely nodded. He would save the explanation for the sheriff.

The men agreed to do as he’d asked and took off in a hurry.

After they left, he covered Sam with a blanket. He didn’t know what else to do. Never had he felt so powerless. While he waited for the doctor, he gazed down at the blood soaked cloth. Sam’s buckskin shirt was also badly stained with blood. The sight sickened him. It wasn’t merely the sight of blood that appalled him, it was the sight of his *brother’s blood*.

Sam’s ashen color and the fact that he hadn’t stirred at all since the shooting made Edward’s apprehension grow even stronger.

He’d failed his big brother. He should have done a better job of defusing the situation. He’d let Forbes hurl insult after insult at Sam. The only thing that had held him back was the fact that the horrible man was Catherine’s father.

But he shouldn’t have hesitated. Now it was too late. Two men were dead and Sam might soon be. *God forbid!*

Every minute that passed seemed like an hour as worry tightened his heart in a crushing vice.

Sam couldn’t die. Could he?

Edward dragged a wooden chair over next to the bed, sat, and then clutched Sam’s cold hand in both of his. “Sam, you must pull yourself back from wherever it is you’ve gone. Catherine needs you. Little John and Rory need you. I need you. You’ve always been there for us, stronger and tougher than anyone. And now that you’re not, I don’t know what to do.” Edward struggled to keep from crying. “Sam!”

He gently laid Sam’s hand on the bed, stood, and started to pace the small room, his boots stomping his worry into the wooden floor. An icy fear suddenly threatened to totally engulf him, so he let the heat of his anger rise to counter it. He strode to the door, left it slightly ajar, and peered down the hall.

Where was that damn doctor anyway? “Doctor!” he shouted, hoping someone would hear him. “Doctor!”

He turned back and threw the door open. It banged noisily against the wall. He left it open and sat down next to Sam again.

He gripped the bed linens tightly in both of his fists. “Sam, don’t make me have to go back and tell Catherine that I shot her father and let you get killed. I can’t do it! I won’t do it, damn it.”

He shook his head vehemently. Helplessly. Miserably.

The doctor and sheriff finally hurried in. A woman trailed closely behind them carrying a bowl of water and a stack of cloths.

Edward stared up at the three with pleading tear-filled eyes. “Please help him.”

## CHAPTER 28

Edward watched, his fingernails biting into the palms of his fisted hands, as the doctor gingerly unwrapped the makeshift bandage from Sam's head.

"Has he woken up at all?"

"No, Dr. MacDonald, he hasn't," he answered.

"Has he moved around or stirred at all?"

"No, he hasn't. Not even a little." Edward didn't have to ask, he knew that wasn't a good sign.

The doctor looked up at him. "Not even a moan?"

Unable to speak, Edward shook his head and swallowed the emotions swelling up in his throat.

The woman took the bloody cloth from Dr. MacDonald and sat it on the floor.

"Thank you, Mrs. Johnson," the doctor told her.

"The bleeding seems to have stopped," MacDonald said. "That's good. Let me just have a closer look. Mrs. Johnson, move that candle closer."

The woman did as the doctor requested and he inclined his head. Standing on the other side of the bed, Edward could see himself that the gash appeared quite deep.

"The ball burned a path right through his scalp," the doctor said. "That's why he bled so much. In a way, the blood loss is good. We often let a wound bleed for a while to clean it of dirt."

"Can you fix it?" Edward asked.

"If anyone can patch him up, it's Doc MacDonald," the sheriff

offered. The young man, who'd introduced himself earlier as Sheriff Lynn, stood nearby holding his hat.

"I can stitch the wound up, but I don't know what the shot's impact did to his brain."

"What do you mean?" he demanded.

"It depends a lot on the angle of the ball's path. If it was outwards, away from Captain Wyllie's head, the pressure from the impact might not have been that significant. If it was inwards, coming at an angle pointed toward the back of his head, the force could have been far greater," MacDonald explained. "I need to get this shirt off of him so we can clean him up."

"I'll help," he said. "How do you want to do it?"

"The best way is to cut it off. That will disturb him the least."

Edward used Sam's big knife to make quick work of the buckskin shirt. The blood had dripped down his brother's broad chest all the way to his navel. They pulled the hunting shirt out from underneath him and tossed it to the floor next to the bloodied bandage.

"Mrs. Johnson, please clean up all this blood and then I'll get the wound stitched." He stood and let the woman take his place in the chair beside Sam's head.

Edward thought back and tried to remember where Sam was in relation to Appleton. What direction did the shot come from?

"Can you show us?" MacDonald asked, already guessing what Edward was trying to figure out.

"Yes, I think so."

"Yes, I need to know what happened," Sheriff Lynn said.

Edward drew a diagram in the thin layer of dust on the room's dresser. "Sam and I were horseback facing three men, also mounted. Remington Forbes was in the middle and a man named Appleton, the man who shot Sam, was to our right. Oh dear Lord, the angle would have been toward Sam, not away from him."

"That might be bad news," MacDonald told him. "We just won't know for a few hours. The good news is that the lead didn't penetrate. It just flew by, hopefully harmlessly."

Edward pointed to his brother's wound. "That doesn't look harmless to me!" His loud voice reverberated against the low ceiling in the room. He raked his fingers through his hair and let out a deep sigh. "I'm sorry. I'm just so damn worried about my brother."

The doctor patted Edward's arm kindly and handed him a dampened cloth. "Here, clean that blood off your neck while you speak with the sheriff. I'll get your brother's wound stitched up. Then we'll leave you alone with him. What he needs now is a quiet room to rest. I'll come back in the morning. I suspect he'll come around by then."

"Do you truly think so?" he prodded.

"Yes. He looks as though he's been through far worse based on the battle scars I see on his chest."

"He has," he confirmed.

Sam bore other terrible scars too, including those on his back from a British whip. And still others, those left on his brother's mind, which would never heal completely.

While the doctor worked on Sam, Edward spoke quietly with the sheriff. He described the entire horrible event and Forbes' appalling motives. The sheriff quickly concluded the incident was self-defense.

Edward feared Catherine would not be as understanding.



Biting her lip, Dora paced, worried about Edward and Sam. They should have been back by now. Edward had told her they would be home by early evening since they wouldn't be leaving until after noon, but it was now nearly 9:00 p.m. They should have been home hours ago. It was only a four or five hour ride.

"I wouldn't worry overmuch," Catherine said. "They probably had more to do making the arrangements for the mine than they planned on."

"I don't know. Something doesn't feel right to me. Edward is always so precise. He sounded certain about when they would arrive."

"Perhaps they worked late and they decided to return in the morning so they wouldn't have to travel at night," Catherine

suggested. "Don't worry, Edward is in good hands. Sam is about as fierce a warrior as there ever was. He's well used to traveling in the mountains and wild woods. He wouldn't let anything happen to Edward."

As casually as she could manage, Dora said, "I'm sure you're right. I guess I'm just a nervous newlywed. It's just that I've never loved anyone like I love Edward. He means so much to me."

"I can tell," Catherine said kindly. "I know exactly how you feel. Sam is my lifeblood. Without him..."

"No, let's not even think about such things. I'm sure they are both fine. Forgive me for being such a fusspot." It was plainly her own uneasiness and she shouldn't make Catherine worry too. She took a deep breath in an effort to calm herself.

Catherine took hold of her hand and said, "I tell you what, if they're not back by noon tomorrow, we'll both go up there. That is if you think I can leave Rory with your cook."

"Of course. Mrs. Hollingsworth would take the greatest of care with Rory. She's so sweet and she told me that she raised four children of her own. But do you think that would be wise? The two of us traveling up there without a proper escort?"

"Dora, I've lived on the frontier too long to worry about what's proper. We are both experienced riders who know how to handle a horse. Sam told me it's a well-used trail up to the mountains. It might also be a chance for a little adventure. What say you? Are you willing?"

"Certainly! But I hope it won't be necessary for us to go," she said. "I'd rather have the two return here excited about the mine."

"Agreed. But just in case it is necessary, let's don our riding habits and boots in the morning instead of gowns and slippers so we'll be prepared to leave if necessary. I'll have my dagger. Do you have a pistol?"

"I do. Edward keeps one by both the front and back doors. And I know how to shoot one accurately. My father taught me."

"Good. Be sure one is loaded and take it, along with powder and ball," Catherine advised. "We'll leave the other for Mrs. Hollingsworth, in case she needs it."



“Do you think there’s a possibility of danger?”

“I don’t know what to think anymore. I only know my father is capable of doing the unthinkable. He could have had men follow us here.”

“I’ll tell her to be on guard. And I’ll have Mrs. Hollingsworth pack some food in case we run into our husbands on their way back. Then the four of us can just have a pleasant picnic before we return to Barrington.”

Catherine smiled at the thought. “That sounds delightful. Let’s pray that is what awaits us tomorrow.”

Dora was unsure what awaited them, but something inside her made her think it wouldn’t be pleasant.

Sitting together, they chatted for some time like the long-lost friends that they were, before Dora decided to address the unpleasant topic of Catherine’s parents. “Did you have a chance to speak with your mother before you left Boston?” she asked.

“Yes. She came to visit me at the inn while Sam was out purchasing our new thoroughbreds. I don’t know what you told her, but she seemed to have had a change of heart. She never held Rory, but at least she would smile agreeably at him. And she wanted me tell her the entire story of everything that had happened to me since I left Boston.”

“That’s encouraging,” Dora said.

“She actually listened attentively and seemed sympathetic to the difficulties I experienced. I told her about our fine home, our horse farm, the people who work for us, and described the rest of Sam’s family members to her—Stephen and Jane and their two lovely daughters; Bear and Artis; and William and Kelly and their darling little girl. I told her how we all gathered for Christmas and how Rory and I almost didn’t survive his birth.”

“Did she seem to want to accept Sam as your husband?”

“No, she never indicated that. I fear she thinks he is beneath me. Nothing could be further from the truth.”

“He is an extraordinary man. Edward is so proud of him.”

“Yes, all of Sam’s brothers are. They all look up to him.”

“Do you think your mother still believes Sam forced you to marry him?”

“No, I don’t think so. But I can tell she still thinks he married me for my fortune. Sometimes wealth can be as much of a curse as a blessing.”

“What about your father? Did your mother say anything about his thinking?”

“He came by the inn while my mother and I were visiting. He told me he was late because he had business to take care of first. Business always comes first with him.” Catherine paused and looked out the window into the darkness. “Actually, I was glad he came late, it gave mother and me a chance to talk. Fortunately, they both left before Sam returned.”

“What happened? What did Mr. Forbes have to say?”

Catherine turned back to face her. “Sadly, my father is more concerned about making his fortune than making me happy. He never once showed interest in Rory. All he could talk about was acquiring a gold mine. He has all these grand plans for us. He won’t accept the fact that I’m going back to Kentucky.”

“He’s obsessed with wealth,” Dora told her.

“And he’s willfully built a wall around his heart—his own prison. A wall built of bricks made from greed, materialism, ambition, conceit, and arrogance. I’ve given up on him. Since he won’t change, I have to. I am no longer going to let him make me unhappy. I have too much to live for now. So much that makes me happy. Most of all Sam and Rory.”

“At least you know you tried to reach him. You will never have to have regrets about that,” Dora said.

“Agreed. I think that’s why Sam wanted to bring me here. To settle my feelings for my father in my heart and mind once and for all.”

“Have you?” she asked.

Catherine paused for a moment thinking, then admitted, “It’s settled in my mind. I’m still working on my heart.”

Dora sympathized. “It must be hard to give up on a member of

your family. It will take time to accept something that difficult.”

“I must. He’s given me no choice,” Catherine said. “It’s hard to keep caring for someone who only thinks about himself. Who gives you only disappointment, hurt, and betrayal in exchange for your love.”

“But now you have your own family. And an extended family that loves you as well. I’ve always treasured your friendship, but now we’re sisters too. That means a lot to me.”

“And it means a great deal to me, Dora. Shall we have a glass of sherry to toast our sisterhood?” Catherine suggested. “Perhaps it will help us grow sleepy.”

Dora chuckled. “I think I will require two glasses to make me sleep this night.” She shot another furtive glance at the mantel clock.

Later, when she blew the candle out beside her bed, worry again gripped her heart and sleep eluded her for much of the long night.

## CHAPTER 29

“It’s noon!” Dora declared, looking at the mantel clock for the hundredth time that morning. “God help us, something *is* wrong.”

“Let’s go!” Catherine said, her voice urgent.

Dora stuck the pistol in a sheath on her belt and tossed the straps to the powder horn and ball bag over her head as they raced to the kitchen to say goodbye to Mrs. Hollingsworth. Rory lay on his back on a folded blanket watching the cook. He held his toy horse in one hand and a soggy piece of shortbread in the other, while he kicked his legs back and forth.

“We’re leaving, Mrs. Hollingsworth,” Dora told the cook.

Catherine bent down to kiss her son’s head, covered in dark hair the same color as Sam’s. “Mrs. Hollingsworth, Rory is drinking from his porringer now. When he turned five months last week, I bought it in Boston from the silversmith, Paul Revere. It works quite well. It took some getting used to, but now he seems to like it.”

Mrs. Hollingsworth pointed to the shiny silver vessel with a handle sitting on the counter. “I saw you use it last night, Mrs. Wyllie, and I already helped him sip a little milk from it this morning. It’s messy, but he’s getting the idea of it.”

Catherine stood and gazed down at her son, a worried look on her face. “This is the first time I’ve left him since he was born.”

“Don’t you worry one minute about the child,” Mrs. Hollingsworth said. “He may cry just bit when he realizes you’re not here, but he’ll be fine. We’ll all take turns playing with him and he’ll sleep the rest of the time.”

“I know. He does sleep a lot. Thank you for agreeing to watch him for me,” Catherine told her.

“We need to go,” Dora urged.

Mrs. Hollingsworth eyed the pistol at Dora’s waist. “You ladies

keep a sharp eye out. I still think you should take Luke with you," she admonished.

"No, Catherine and I talked about it and we don't want to leave the babe, the maid, and you here without someone to protect you," she explained. "I've already instructed Luke to keep a watchful eye."

"God's speed then," Mrs. Hollingsworth told them.

Dora grabbed the sack of food the cook had packed, and took off sprinting for the stable. Catherine followed on her heels.

She'd asked Luke earlier to have the horses saddled and ready to go at noon and he stood by the horse pen holding the reins of their mounts. "All ready," he said.

"Thank you, Luke," Dora told him. "Remember, keep your eyes open and the doors locked. If you need it, Mrs. Hollingsworth has a pistol by the back door."

"Yes, Mrs. Wyllie."

Dora mounted Archy, the gelding that Edward had picked for her when he took her up to the mountain. Catherine had decided earlier to ride her new thoroughbred. She said the mare had handled well on the trip to Barrington and she was comfortable riding the horse.

"You know the way?" Catherine asked.

"Yes, remember Edward took me there."

Dora urged Archy to a fast trot to take them through town and when they reached the road that led to the mountains she took him to a gallop. Catherine's long-legged thoroughbred easily kept up.

As they rode that afternoon, Dora's mind searched for a plausible explanation for Edward and Sam's long overdue arrival, but nothing came to mind. Only trouble could account for their long delay. The thought sent panic coursing through her.

She glanced over at Catherine. Their ride had whipped color onto her sister-in-law's cheeks and her face held a strong determination to reach their husbands.

Then Dora's mouth went dry as a terrifying question gripped her mind. What if Catherine's father was behind their delay?



As Dora and Catherine made their way higher into the foothills, headed to Crawford Notch, they endured the leering stares of men, mostly mine workers, traveling down the rough road. It was growing late and they needed to make it to the inn before nightfall. This was no place for two women traveling alone at night.

“I’m glad we’re getting close,” she said, trying to reassure Catherine and herself. Perhaps they should have brought Luke along after all. “I can’t abide the ogling stares of these men much longer.”

“These men don’t scare me. Believe me, I’ve seen far worse in Kentucky. Remind me to tell you the story of the menacing buffalo hunters we encountered in Boonesborough. Now they were a scary sort.”

Within the hour, just as the sun began to slip behind the other side of the White Mountains, they arrived at the Crawford Notch Inn.

They both dismounted, tied their horses, and hurried in. Dora approached the desk first.

“Mrs. Williams,” the clerk said, remembering her. “You’re back soon.”

“Yes, Sir. It’s Mrs. Wyllie now. I’m looking for my husband Edward Wyllie.”

“He may be with my husband, Captain Sam Wyllie,” Catherine added.

“They’re both here. I’m sorry to say, one of them is badly injured. I don’t know which one.”

Dora reached for Catherine’s hand and gripped it, feeling the blood drain from her face.

“Where are they?” Catherine demanded.

“Room thirty-one, down that corridor,” he said pointing. “If you’re staying this evening I can rent you the room next to it if you’d like.”

“Yes, but we’ll arrange that later,” Dora called over her shoulder as she headed toward the room, her heart racing.

Both women raised the skirts of their riding habits and sprinted down the hall. Dora didn't bother to knock. She threw open the door.

Edward sat in a chair next to the bed, the only light in the room the rays of the evening's sunset streaming in from the small elevated window. He sprung up and reached for her. Large blotches of blood stains covered his linen shirt.

"Edward!" She ran to him and threw her arms around his waist, her relief so great that she couldn't stop herself.

At once, though, she noticed Sam who lay on the bed, unmoving and his eyes closed. A large laceration, held together with stiches, marred the side of his head.

Catherine peered down at her husband, her face revealing the shock of the sight before her. "Sam!" she cried.

"He was shot yesterday," Edward said, "as we were approaching Crawford Notch. The doctor thought he would have come around by this morning, but he didn't. I've been by his side since the doctor left yesterday evening, but Sam hasn't moved or stirred once. Not once!" His tired eyes revealed profound worry.

"No!" Catherine wailed. "Tell me he'll be all right. Please, Edward, tell me."

Her pleading voice made Dora want to weep and she put an arm around Catherine's shaking shoulders.

"The doctor came again this afternoon and said he just didn't know. The lead only grazed Sam's scalp, but the force of the impact could have done more damage."

"Lord God, please let him be all right," Catherine whispered, as she took Sam's hand.

"He'll pull out of this. I'm certain of it," Edward said. "He's a fighter, Catherine."

"I know," she said softly, tears beginning to stream down her cheeks.

"Who did this?" Dora demanded in a low voice.

Edward grimaced and looked as though he'd rather do anything other than answer her question. "Let's step outside for a minute and

give Catherine some time alone with Sam.” Taking her hand, he led her out of the room.

Edward took long strides down the hall until he found a private alcove where they could talk.

“Edward, what’s wrong? What haven’t you told us?”

“It was Mr. Forbes and his men. They confronted us on the trail and Forbes deliberately provoked Sam. He kept saying horrible things until Sam finally charged him. Then Forbes yelled to his man, Appleton, to shoot Sam and he did. I tried to stop him, but I couldn’t.”

“Oh heavens! Then what happened?”

“Then...” he hesitated and took a steadying breath. “One of the men fled, but Forbes withdrew his pistol and was about to shoot Sam, to finish him off. So I shot Forbes.”

She stopped breathing for a moment. “Did you kill Catherine’s father?”

“Yes. Lord help me, I did. I had to. He was about to kill Sam!”

“Thank God you didn’t let that happen.”

“How am I going to tell Catherine? Bloody hell, I dread having to tell her.”

“I’ll do it.”

“No, I need to. I was the one that shot him. I should be the one to tell her.”

“If she doesn’t ask who shot him, let’s wait until morning. She’s had a terrible shock finding Sam in this condition and she’s wearied from the ride up here.”

“All right,” he agreed. “Dora, I’m so worried about Sam.”

“I know. You look exhausted too. I’ll go arrange for our room. The clerk said we could have the one next to Sam. And I’ll have someone stable and feed the horses Catherine and I rode up here. I rode Archy and she rode her new mare.”

“Will you be sure they’re caring for Longshanks and the gelding Sam rode too? I’ve been so worried about Sam I haven’t checked on



them.”

“Of course I will. And I’ll have some food and coffee sent to Sam’s room.”

“I don’t know if I can sleep, although I haven’t slept since night before last and then I didn’t sleep well.”

Dora put her hand on his arm. “It’s going to be okay, Edward.” She hoped she wouldn’t be proven wrong.

He put his arms around her. “I’m so glad you’re here. I need you next to me. Now more than ever.”

## CHAPTER 30

Edward was glad he gave away his pocket watch. For those who wait, particularly at night, time seems to deliberately inch along.

Catherine refused to rest, despite his and Dora's encouragement to do so. She stayed sitting by Sam's side, holding his hand, and whispering her love and encouragement.

Sometime around midnight, Edward could not keep his eyes open any longer. He didn't want to leave, but Dora insisted that he go to their room.

"If you don't get some sleep, you're going to keel over," she told him as she opened the door to their room. "And you're entirely too heavy for me to lift."

He staggered toward the bed, sat down and removed his boots, and then laid down on the bed fully clothed. Dazed and weakened, he didn't have the energy to remove his clothing. He'd been wearing the same clothes for three days and he badly needed to bathe and shave, but in the surreal world he found himself in, clothing and bathing seemed trivial needs indeed. His only thoughts were for Sam.

With closed eyes and a weak voice, he whispered the question he feared most. "What if he never comes out of it?"



Dora heard Edward snoring softly before she could answer. "He will. I'm going to pray exceedingly hard tonight."

She pulled a blanket over her exhausted husband.

There was nothing either one of them could do for Sam now. Only God could heal him. Oh how she prayed that would happen. If something happened to Sam, Edward would be crushed. He had just found happiness again and she prayed it would not be ripped away

from him so cruelly. He'd already suffered far too much loss and tragedy.

She undressed and washed her face and then wiggled under the covers next to him. Edward slept fitfully and she knew she would get little sleep this night. She placed her hand on his chest and he seemed to calm.

Then she prayed hard indeed, for both Sam and Edward, until her own fatigue claimed her.



“Dora! Edward! Come quickly,” she heard Catherine yell outside their door.

What time was it? It was still dark, but Dora felt as though she'd slept a few hours. It must be close to dawn. She sat up and saw that Edward was already tugging his boots on. She grabbed her robe and followed him out of their room.

The door to Sam's room was already open. “Hurry, he woke up!” Catherine called excitedly, as she helped Sam sip some water.

They hurried to the other side of the bed.

Sam's eyes appeared bright and he tried to give them a slight grin as he said, “Good morning.” His voice sounded dry and crackly even after his drink of water.

Dora smiled at Sam and then Catherine before she glanced back at Edward.

Her husband held his right fist pressed against his mouth and tears glistened in his eyes. Edward swallowed hard before he could speak. “Sam, I was afraid you were never going to wake again.”

“I thought I dodged that shot pretty well. Just a little nick here,” he said, pointing to the stiches. “Nothing to worry about. I feel fine.” He glanced up at Catherine. “Where's Rory?”

Catherine was still smiling broadly, tears of joy slipping from her eyes as well, as she gazed down at her husband. “Mrs. Hollingsworth is taking good care of our son. He'll be fine.”

Edward looked as though he didn't know whether to laugh or

cry. He wiped his eyes with a knuckle and grasped Sam's hand. "Welcome back, big brother."

"How long have I been lying here? I've got a terrible thirst and a hunger you can't imagine."

Catherine poured Sam some more water from a nearby pitcher and helped her husband sip it while Edward answered.

"Almost two days," Edward told him. "I brought you here after you were shot. Got the doctor to stitch you up. He said to let you rest."

"What time is it?" Sam asked.

Edward reached for his pocket watch. Then his hand froze as he remembered it was somewhere over the Atlantic by now.

"I don't know. It should be dawn soon, I think. The doc also said that once you woke, if you were alert and able to ask and answer questions, you were going to be fine. He said you should also try to get up and move about. But he said to take it easy for a day or so."

"He will," Catherine said firmly.

"What happened to Forbes and his men?" Sam asked. "The last thing I remember is charging toward Forbes. I'm guessing his man is the one who shot me. I owe that whoreson and Forbes a good beating. Sorry Catherine, but you wouldn't believe the things your father said."

Dora guessed that Catherine could believe the horrible things Forbes was capable of saying. But the man's vicious tongue would no longer hurt his daughter or anyone else ever again.

Catherine's eyes widened in alarm. "My father was here?" she asked Edward. When he didn't answer she looked back at Sam.

"You didn't tell her?" Sam asked, an incredulous look on his face.

Sam doesn't know the half of it, Dora thought. This was not going to be easy for Edward.

Edward sighed. "Catherine, please sit down."

Her blue eyes narrowed and her dark brows creased, but she sat down.

Standing on the other side of the bed from Catherine, Edward related the entire unfortunate confrontation from start to finish.

Catherine and Sam both listened without interrupting.

When Catherine learned of her father's death, and the reason for it, she said with quivering lips, "Thank you for saving Sam."

"I am so sorry, Catherine," Edward told her. "I tried to stop your father. I asked him to put down his weapon, but he just took aim at Sam. If I hadn't shot him, he would have killed Sam. I'm certain of it."

"He reaped what he sowed," Catherine said, sniffing. Her shoulders dropped as she started sobbing.

Sam tried to sit up and reach for her, but still weak, sank back down. Catherine slumped to Sam's side and he wrapped his arms around her shaking shoulders. She wept against his chest for some time.

Dora presumed that a good part of Catherine's grief stemmed from the realization that she could no longer hope for her father to change. She could no longer hold out hope for a normal relationship with him. Now it was too late.

"I'm going to get dressed," she whispered to Edward. "Then let's go get some food and coffee for all of us." She grabbed his elbow and ushered him into their room. "And I'm ordering a bath for you."

"I know I could use one. I wish I could wash away my memory of the last two days." He sat on the bed, and buried his whisker covered face in his hands.

She remained quiet while she dressed quickly. He needed some time to sort this all out.

"What happens now?" she asked as they walked toward the inn's front lobby to order the bath and food.

"I'll speak to the sheriff later this morning about getting help with the burial. We'll have to bury Forbes and his man here. It's already been almost two days since he was shot," he said. "I'm sure Catherine will understand."

"What about the third man that got away?" she asked.

"He didn't do anything. At the first sign of trouble, he took off.

So as far as I'm concerned, he wasn't a part of it," Edward explained. "What made you two come up here anyway? I was too distraught to ask earlier."

"I was worried about you. We waited until noon yesterday and decided that if you and Sam hadn't shown up by then, we were going after you. I'm so glad we did."

"I'm sure hearing Catherine's voice helped Sam to come out of it."

"I think you're right," she agreed.

"But I'm sure they will both want to get back to Rory. Tomorrow, if Sam's well enough, we'll leave for Barrington. We can take it slow, even if we have to arrive very late."



"There's only one thing wrong with this bath," Edward said. The feel of Dora's soapy hands sliding across his back made him want to slide his own hands over her luscious body.

"What's that?" she asked, as she began rinsing his back.

"You're not in it."

"Oh no, I'm ordering my own bath. You're far too dirty to share your water," she said as she dried her hands.

He grinned roguishly. "I was dirty. I'm clean now."

The food and bath had made Edward feel like a new man.

"That is an extremely good thing. Here, wash your shirt. The blood stains won't come out but at least it will be clean. I'll hang it outside to dry in the breeze while I take my bath."

"Good idea. The doc and I had to cut Sam's buckskin shirt off him to get him cleaned up. I'll have to give him the extra shirt I brought. While you order your bath, I'll get dressed."

"I'm going to go ask Catherine if she needs one ordered for her room too."

"Take that shirt I laid out for Sam, will you?"

She grabbed the shirt, stepped into the hall, and closed the door behind her.

She tapped softly on the door. "Catherine?"

To her surprise, it was Sam who opened the door a crack. He looked pale and spent, but at least he was up and walking. "Catherine's fallen asleep," he whispered. "I don't think she slept much last night."

"She didn't sleep at all."

"Please excuse my appearance. I've searched everywhere, but my buckskin shirt seems to have disappeared."

"Edward said there was so much blood they had to cut it off to clean you up. He sent this for you." As she handed him the shirt, Dora tried not to stare at the terrible scars on Sam's shoulder and abdomen, silent evidence of his sacrifice to his country. Now he would have yet another scar, a silent testament to Forbes' madness.

As he slipped the shirt on, she asked, "I'm going to the front desk to order a bath. Do you want a bath too?"

"Indeed," he said. "A bath will help. My muscles have grown achy from laying in a bed for so long."

"All right. I'll order one for your room too," she said, smiling. "But I will expect you to share it with Catherine. I'm sure she's covered in trail dust like I am."

"She can have a soak first. Thank you for bringing her up here. Having her here has given me strength."

"How are you feeling, Sam?"

"Aside from a bit of a headache and the soreness around the stitches I feel well enough."

Dora guessed that Sam was not the kind of man to admit to weakness even if he was feeling frail.

"Dora, please tell Edward that we need to get Forbes and his man buried today and then get back to Barrington."

"Edward said he would arrange their burial with the sheriff later this morning and that we would leave for Barrington tomorrow if

you're feeling up to travel."

"I will be."

"We'll just have to take it slower than normal. You won't be galloping, that's for sure."

"I can make it. I want to get Catherine back to Rory soon, no matter how difficult it might be."

"I'll let Edward know as soon as I get back from the front desk."

"Thank you, Dora, and can you have them deliver another pot of coffee?" Sam asked. "I'm still thirsty after sleeping for two days."

She nodded and turned to leave.

"Dora."

"Yes?"

"I'm glad you're a part of our family."

"Me too."



## CHAPTER 31

Later that day, Sam stood with Catherine next to her father's fresh grave. He shook his head as he said, "I don't think he ever understood the content of your character."

"Nor yours," she said. "He never saw us for who we really are. His vision was hopelessly blurred by dreams of wealth."

Sam placed his hand on her shoulder and drew her against him. "Love is the only true wealth."

"Then we are richly blessed," she said.



Early the next morning, Edward went with Sam to the inn's stable to saddle their four horses.

He left Dora watching over Catherine at the small community's graveyard. They all wanted to give Catherine one last chance to say goodbye to her father.

Edward pitied Catherine. Finding the right words to say farewell to a father like Forbes would be troublesome.

With Sam at his side, he stared at the ground as he walked, thinking. Killing those two men left a vile feeling in his gut that he couldn't seem to shake. The fact that one was Catherine's father made it all the worse.

"You're pondering something," Sam said. "It's the killing isn't it?"

"I feel so bad when I think about slaying Catherine's father. It all happened so fast. In the blink of an eye."

"Edward, what you did was necessary and heroic. You saved my life in that blink of an eye. I will be forever grateful for that."

“You would have done the same for me.”

“I would have,” Sam agreed. “I’m proud of you Edward. What you did took skill *and* courage.”

Edward swallowed the lump in his throat. He grabbed Longshanks saddle blanket and tossed it over the stallion’s back and then picked up the saddle. “Forbes was a rotten selfish bastard. Nonetheless, I wish Dora and I had been able to convince him how wrong he was. If we had, things might have turned out differently.”

“I know it’s hard to kill a man. And you had to kill two.”

“It was the first time I’ve ever killed anyone.”

“Believe me, it never gets easier. But it was us or them,” Sam said.

“It was.”

“Edward, I came close to dying back there. You...saved me.”

Thankful he’d been able to save Sam, he tightened the cinch under Longshanks, flipped the stirrup downward, and then said, “Sam.”

Sam glanced up and Edward looked across the seats of both saddles and said, “I love you big brother. If you’d died, I would have been lost without you.”

“No, as the next oldest, you would have stepped up and become the big brother to the others. You’re a strong, brave man, Edward. I’m certain of it.”

Edward moved around his stallion’s hips and stood next to Sam. “When you left for Kentucky, I didn’t realize how big a hole you would leave in my life.”

Then Sam did something rare for him. He gave Edward a robust hug and said, “It was hard on all of us to leave you behind.”

Edward embraced him back, whole-heartedly, truly grateful that God had spared Sam.

“Watch the head,” Sam said, pulling away.

“If it weren’t so big, it wouldn’t get in the way,” Edward teased.

They both shared a chuckle.

“Are you sure you’re feeling up to this ride?” Edward asked.

“Catherine needs to get back to Rory, and I want to as well, so it doesn’t matter how I feel. Besides the doctor wrapped it well yesterday to keep it clean and gave me some kind of salve to put on it. I’ll be fine.”

“All right, Sam, but we’ll take it nice and slow. There’s no reason to be in a hurry.”

While they saddled the four horses, he kept an eye on Sam who, now and then, stared off into the distance at the glorious sunrise painting the magnificent mountains. As a soldier, hunter, tracker, and map maker, Sam had spent most of his life around New Hampshire’s mountains. Edward wondered if Sam missed them. “Do you miss our home? These mountains?” he asked.

“It would be a lie to say I didn’t. But this isn’t home any more. Home is on the frontier. That’s where my heart is.”

Edward smiled, glad that Sam had finally found where he belonged.

As he watched Sam, his brother showed no sign of weakness. But then Sam had always been a tough man, able to endure most anything man or nature threw at him. But this incident made Edward realize that Sam was not invincible.

In truth, no one is.



When they finally reached Barrington and Edward’s house late that evening, they were all weary. Sam cuddled Rory for a minute and then, too tired to eat, his brother went straight to bed.

Catherine said she would put Rory in bed next to Sam and then join them in the parlor to talk and share a drink. Dora went to speak to Mrs. Hollingsworth while Edward poured the women a glass of sherry and a brandy for himself.

Dora returned first and told him that she’d asked Mrs. Hollingsworth to bring in a tray of assorted cheeses, butter, jams, and breads for them to snack on.

Catherine joined them a few minutes later. "I fear if I go to bed too soon, I'll dream of my father." She appeared lost in thought as she stared out one of the parlor windows.

Edward handed Catherine the small glass of sherry. He stood next to her and gazed out the window into the darkness. "Catherine, I will always regret that I was the one to shoot him."

Catherine squeezed her eyes shut and hung her head.

Behind him, Dora declared, "Edward, you had no choice. Forbes brought it on himself. He shouldn't have been there and he certainly shouldn't have said what he did to provoke Sam."

Catherine turned back to face the room. Her icy blue eyes now blazed with heat. "To think that my father could have actually shot my husband in cold blood," she swore, her temper flaring. "It sickens me." She downed the sherry in one gulp.

"It is hard to fathom," Dora agreed.

"He would have...killed the father of my son!" she said, nearly choking on her own words. "Killed the man whose life I value more than my own." She held her empty glass out to him. "May I have a brandy this time please?"

Catherine's words expressed her anger, but in her eyes he also perceived hurt and confusion. He hoped the brandy would dull some of the pain and help her sleep. But tomorrow she would have to face the terrible truth of her own father's treachery.

"How could he betray you, his own daughter, like that?" Dora asked.

Because he was a mean bastard, Edward thought, as he poured the brandy. But he wouldn't say anything that negative about Catherine's father. Not now.

He needed to just listen—to let her vent her emotions. He handed Catherine the refilled glass.

Catherine accepted the brandy and then set it down so hard some of it splashed out as she faced Edward. "If you hadn't been there with Sam...if you hadn't fired that shot, then Sam would be dead," she said, her voice taut with the frightening possibility.

Dora gazed up at him with distress in her beautiful eyes. "And if

you hadn't vaulted off that horse and used Sam's pistol to shoot the other fellow, you'd be dead too. I'd be a widow again."

"But I *was* there ladies. And, thank the good Lord, Sam is going to be okay and I'm fine."

But Catherine wouldn't be calmed. No longer numb with shock, her anger and hurt could not be suppressed. "My God, why did he do this!" she shouted. "He was deceitful and selfish! I always held out hope that someday he would change. Now that hope is buried forever with him." Her face paled and she took a seat, but anger still simmered within her, threatening her fragile control.

Dora tried to soothe Catherine. "Yes, your father did evil things, Catherine, but remember he was a man possessed. He was so used to controlling everyone and everything that he never recognized when greed and wealth became an obsession and controlled him. It was a sad addiction."

Mrs. Hollingsworth bustled in carrying a large tray. "I didn't know when you would be arriving so I didn't fix enough food earlier. We have no leftovers. I hope this will do until tomorrow morning. Then I'll make you the grandest breakfast you ever had," the cook informed them.

"That will do nicely," Dora told her. "Thank you."

"Mrs. Wyllie, I'm so sorry to learn of your father's passing," Mrs. Hollingsworth told Catherine and patted her kindly on the shoulder.

"Thank you, Mrs. Hollingsworth," Catherine replied.

"I'm sorry he died," the cook said and then looked at Edward, "but I'm so thankful this guardian angel was there to protect Mr. Sam."

Edward remembered when he'd told Dora's uncles that he was her guardian angel, primarily just to frighten them away.

After Mrs. Hollingsworth left the parlor, Catherine stood and hurried over to him. "Don't let my anger confuse you, Edward. I'm angry at my father, not you. You *were* a guardian angel. You saved Sam's life."

"Your anger is completely understandable," Edward said. "I was furious with him myself. We almost lost Sam. And he made me kill two people. But I would do it again if necessary. I would do anything

to protect Sam, and you and Rory. And Dora. You're my family."

She turned toward Dora. "Oh how I dread having to tell mother. If I know her, she'll be lost without him. He controlled everything in her life."

"She may be stronger than you think," Dora said.

Famished, Edward cut a slice of bread and a hunk of cheese while he told Catherine, "Don't worry. You won't be alone. We'll be right there with you. And I'm sure Dora's father will be more than willing to help with legal matters as well."

"Of course he will," Dora confirmed.

"Thank you," Catherine told them.

As he ate the food, Edward decided not to say anything about her father's finances. He'd leave that to Dora's father or maybe George Abernathy, Forbes' arrogant lawyer. But seeking Abernathy's help might be like letting the devil in the door.

Unfortunately, Mr. Forbes' financial woes would add yet another burden on Catherine that she didn't need right now. She already appeared nearly beside herself as she tried to cope with a raging storm of grief, anger, and turmoil.

Dora handed Catherine a small plate of cheese and bread.

Catherine let out a long sigh and accepted the food, seeming a bit calmer. "What do I do now?"

Edward sat down across from Catherine. "I'll arrange for a headstone for your father's grave, so you won't have to worry about that." Unfortunately, he was well acquainted with the local stone carver. "The next thing is for you to talk to Sam tomorrow morning. See what he wants to do."

"We need to get Sam well enough to travel to Boston. I think he's going to need a few days to recuperate," Catherine said. "But if I know Sam, he'll be anxious to get this all settled so we can get back to Kentucky. He misses Little John and we both want to get Rory back home."

"Do you miss Kentucky?" Dora asked.

Catherine's eyes lit up and she managed a small smile. "I do.

Very much so. Our home is nestled in the most glorious place, a virgin forest near Cumberland Falls—where Sam and I spent our honeymoon. We camped on the shore of the Cumberland River. The falls there are simply magnificent but the Moonbow is magical.”

“Moonbow?” Dora asked her.

“You’d have to see it to appreciate its true beauty. When the full moon shines through the mist from the falls, it creates a Moonbow that hangs over the river. It’s like a rainbow, but it’s at night and it’s white. It’s like looking up at the light of love.”

“Perhaps we will someday,” Edward said. He gazed at Dora, his own light of love.

## CHAPTER 32

Mrs. Forbes lay prone on her opulent elaborately carved walnut bed as Dora and Catherine looked on helplessly. Heavy drapes held the room in deep shadows.

Much to Dora's surprise, Catherine's mother took the news of her husband's passing stoically. She hadn't fainted as Catherine had anticipated. She didn't scream or wail. She didn't even get angry. As they'd explained the confrontation that resulted in her husband's death, her body had stiffened and her face registered her shock. But no tears fell from her eyes. She simply went upstairs and laid face down on her bed, fully dressed.

Catherine had followed behind her mother and, not knowing what else to do, Dora did as well.

After a few minutes, Catherine asked, "Mother, do you want us to leave you alone or would you rather we stay here with you?"

Dora stood near the door waiting, unsure what to do.

"Catherine, dear," Alexa said, rolling to her side, "come here." The woman extended a hand toward her daughter.

Dora turned to leave, but Mrs. Forbes called to her.

"No, don't leave Dora. Shut the door and take a seat."

She glanced around at several upholstered chairs and chose one situated where she could see both Catherine's and Mrs. Forbes' faces.

The large bedroom's distinctly feminine colors, lacy frills, and pungent rose fragrance made her think that Alexa did not share this bedroom with her husband. She would not be surprised to learn that she didn't share her bed with him either.

Catherine stepped closer and her mother tapped the bedcover, indicating that her daughter should sit beside her.



“Do you need to sleep a while or would you like some tea?” Catherine asked before she took a seat.

“No my dear, I need no sleep. And we’ll have tea later,” Alexa said. “What I surely need is...my daughter’s love back.”

Although Dora saw no moisture in the older woman’s eyes, she heard tears in her confession.

Catherine sat down next to her mother. She appeared uneasy and wary.

Sounding miserable, Alexa’s voice broke as she told Catherine, “I know we have had our differences, but I have always loved you. At all times, I wanted what I thought was best for you. I realize now that was often not what you wanted, including your marriage to Mr. Adams.”

“No, I didn’t want to marry him. But father made the arrangements when I was just fifteen. After a few years, when the time came to wed him, I had no choice in the matter. None,” Catherine said. “You even picked my wedding dress.”

Dora could hear resentment in Catherine’s words even after all this time.

“Catherine, since you left last week to go to Barrington, I’ve spent many long and troubled nights soul searching. I realized that I needed to say something to you, my daughter.”

“What’s that?”

“I love you. And I want you to know that. Despite everything I’ve said and done.”

Catherine’s eyes widened. “I love you too, Mother, but I love Sam and Rory as well.”

Mrs. Forbes glanced over at Dora and a slight smile touched her lips. “I think I shall have to admit being wrong about Sam. Dora helped me see that.” She turned back to Catherine. “I would never have imagined him as a husband for you. As you know, I would have preferred for you to marry someone of your station, but it appears that he makes you happy.”

Dora couldn’t believe what she was hearing. Relief filled her and she stared, wordlessly.

“Sam makes me extraordinarily happy,” Catherine said. “I never knew that a husband could make a wife as happy as I am. I didn’t experience that with my first husband.”

Alexa’s eyes suddenly filled with fierce tears of bitterness. “I’ve never known that kind of happiness.”

Catherine took hold of her mother’s hands. “I know.”

“Even when we first met, your father was never an affectionate man but he had such great ambition and I admired that. The more successful he became, the more distant he grew. I guess at some point I stopped expecting his love. He gave me everything—and nothing.”

Dora suspected that deep down Mrs. Forbes’ forlorn soul ached with the inner pain of extreme loneliness. She’d become so dependent on their lifestyle, she forgot what truly mattered in life.

Catherine nodded. “I stopped expecting his love years ago too. As a child, I often wondered what it would be like to have his affection. I hoped and hoped that someday he would show me kindness and warmth. But no matter how much respect I showed him, I never found out.”

“I don’t have to tell you that your father was a driven man.”

Catherine nodded. “He was.”

“Ever since we married, day by day, he grew more and more ambitious. But I think your father did love you Catherine. He just forgot how to show it. He became so used to buying everything, he thought he could buy people too. He truly believed that was the way to happiness. And I admit he convinced me as well at times. But it all felt so empty and lonely. You must understand, there are some things and some people you can’t change, and your father was one of them.”

Catherine nodded. “I know that now.”

Dora could see that Catherine and her mother were finding solidarity in their realization that long ago they had both been emotionally abandoned by Forbes.

Mrs. Forbes sat in lonely silence studying her hands for a few moments. “I’m certain I never gave you the love I should have either,” she admitted. “I regret that.”

Alexa’s admission made tears slowly slide down Catherine’s face.

She gulped hard, before she could speak. "Perhaps all of this happened so that we can change that. All I want now is for you to love me, Sam, and Rory. And Little John too, our adopted son. We're a family now. You can't have me without them."

"Can I be a part of your family too?" her mother asked, her voice quivering.

"Yes, yes," Catherine cried and wrapped her arms around her mother.

The two women embraced, both sobbing onto each other's shoulders.

After a few moments, Alexa gave her daughter a squeeze and then laid back against her cushions. She dried her tears with a handkerchief and beamed at Catherine. "I think there may be hope for us after all. We actually cuddled."

Catherine chuckled a bit and wiped her fingers across the tears on her cheeks. "I'm so grateful that you seem to understand. I only wish father had before he died."

Alexa scooted up on the bed and Catherine placed several pillows behind her mother's back.

"Dora, come here," Alexa ordered.

She stood and moved toward the bed, anticipating that Mrs. Forbes would finally release her anger. The woman would hold Edward responsible for killing her husband. Would Alexa ask her to leave? She dreaded what was coming.

"Dora, I want you to know that I realize it wasn't Edward who killed Remington. He was only defending his wounded brother. Remington killed himself, just as surely as if he put a pistol to his own head. In the end, his ambition, or more accurately his greed, killed him."

Dora stared at her in bewilderment. Never would she have expected the woman to understand that. "You are exceedingly wise, Mrs. Forbes."

"I'm afraid my wisdom is a little late in blossoming. But, thanks to your eloquent remarks when you visited us, I began to question my behavior and treatment of Sam and Rory. After you left, I decided that I was wrong about Sam and you made me realize what a brave

daughter I have.” She turned to Catherine. “You should have heard the marvelous things she said about you.”

Catherine smiled at Dora. “I truly appreciate everything you said to my parents, Dora.”

Mrs. Forbes added, “And I realized this too, you had better hang on to that handsome fellow. I could tell that Edward is a good man.”

“Oh, I agree wholeheartedly. That’s why I married him last week.”

“Delighted to hear it! Congratulations,” Mrs. Forbes said. “If I can still afford it after my husband’s affairs are settled, you and Edward will be getting a nice wedding present.”

“Mother, we will all help you settle father’s affairs. And when Dora informed her father of your husband’s death, Mr. Tudor offered to help in any way he could. He can look into your assets and be certain father’s lawyer is settling his affairs properly. If you like.”

“I think that would be wise,” Alexa agreed. “The sooner the better. Remington admitted to me that he may have over extended himself. But he said it was only temporary.”

“If he has, I will take care of his debts,” Catherine offered.

“Only if it is absolutely necessary. If it is required, I would be grateful. I fear I would not do well living in the debtors’ prison on Court Street.”

Dora had to stifle a chuckle at the image that brought to her mind. She wondered what was in the woman’s future. “Mrs. Forbes, what do you think you will want to do?” she asked. “Remain here in Boston or perhaps go live with your son in Virginia on his plantation?”

Catherine nodded. “Or perhaps with Sam and me in Kentucky?”

Alexa lifted her chin a bit. “Boston is my home. I have no intention of ever leaving. If my finances permit, I would like to remain here in my home.”

“Of course, you will,” Catherine assured her. “Sam and I will see to it.”

## CHAPTER 33

It didn't surprise Edward when Sam agreed to stay at the Forbes mansion until matters could be settled. Sam understood how important it was to Catherine that they would both be there to support her mother.

Mrs. Forbes invited Edward and Dora to stay there as well. They accepted but said they would be leaving soon to go on their honeymoon. Edward only agreed for Catherine's sake, thinking she might need their support, but he could not wait for their honeymoon. He wanted some uninterrupted time together to plan their future.

Sam and Catherine decided to stay in Boston until Mr. Tudor and Mr. Abernathy completed the task of liquidating Forbes' assets. Abernathy had told the family that Forbes had already asked him to look into liquidating some of his businesses to accumulate enough cash to purchase the gold mine. So much of the work had already been done. Catherine wanted to be sure that all the debts her father had incurred were paid and that whatever funds remained would be enough to allow her mother to comfortably remain at her home for the rest of her lifetime.

Catherine wrote to her brother in Virginia and explained that their father had died in an unfortunate incident and that their mother's lawyers were liquidating their father's businesses to pay his outstanding debts. She encouraged her brother to visit their mother at his earliest convenience.

Dora had told Sam and Edward about the emotional reconciliation between Catherine and her mother. Mrs. Forbes still seemed much too starchy toward Sam and him, but her warmth toward Catherine and Dora was undeniable. The widow even started to hold Rory in her lap occasionally, although she appeared quite uncomfortable doing so.

Edward couldn't suppress a chuckle when Rory decided to chew on one of her splendid necklaces, causing Alexa's eyes to bulge with disbelief. When she groaned and her face contorted in astonishment,

Rory started wailing so loudly the sound echoed from the room's tall ceiling. Sam quickly snatched up Rory and to everyone's relief the babe ceased his bawling at once.

After spending two evenings at the mansion, Edward and Dora were both ready to get away somewhere. They decided to enjoy another dinner together at the Green Dragon Tavern. This time, the carriage ride there was even more enjoyable. As he kissed her soft yielding lips, he marveled at the happiness they shared. Their marriage wrapped the two of them in a cocoon of euphoria that grew more blissful with each love-filled day and each passionate night.

After they arrived at the tavern, he asked for the same table and luckily got it. A white tablecloth, candle, and this time two pink roses, again lent a romantic ambiance. After wine and a dinner of oysters, garlic and onion potatoes, and a crunchy white bread were served, he told Dora he wanted to leave soon on their honeymoon. The sooner the better. However, deciding where to go was proving difficult.

"What about Niagara Falls?" she suggested, taking a sip of her wine. "Aaron Burr's daughter Theodosia and her new husband honeymooned there. She called it the honeymoon capital of the world and said its mystique is unequalled."

"I read about that as well. I also read that Napoleon Bonaparte's younger brother, Jerome, honeymooned with his American bride at the falls. They traveled there by coach all the way from New Orleans."

"Yes, her name was Elizabeth Patterson," Dora said. "If we go to Niagara Falls, we will be emulating royalty."

"Does that mean I will have to call you Your Highness?" he asked.

Happiness bubbled in her laugh and in her eyes.

"We can go there if you want to, but it's probably still quite chilly up there this time of year. And Niagara Falls is five-hundred miles away. It's northwest of Buffalo on the Canadian border. I'd truly like to get you all to myself sooner rather than later." He eyed her seductively over the rim of his wine glass.

She grinned and nodded. "Understood. And that is a long way. Well, what other ideas do you have?"

He thought for a moment. "What about Cape Cod? I would love

to see you sprawled out on a blanket on one of its wide sandy beaches. And they say the Cape has quaint villages peopled with estimable and friendly folks.”

“I’m more inclined toward a location inland than a seaside one. Living in Boston, I see and smell the ocean every day. I’d prefer someplace scenic and secluded.”

“Then I know just the place!” Edward exclaimed, remembering a newly opened inn that he’d read about in Barrington’s newspaper.

“Where? Tell me!” Her face filled with excitement.

“Mountain View House in Whitefield, New Hampshire.”

“Why there?” she asked.

“It’s a small inn that just opened in the middle of nowhere. The owners picked the location because it has a glorious view of the mountains in every direction. Every peak of the White Mountains. I can’t think of a better place to find some privacy.”

“That sounds perfect. Where is it?”

“About a hundred miles north of Barrington. We could stay a couple of days at my house so I could take care of my stores, get all packed up, and then leave. I understand they’ve widened and improved the trail up there into Mountain View Road and a coach makes regular trips up there to take visitors. It’s about another twenty-five miles past Crawford Notch. I can send a missive letting them know of our arrival and ask them to hold their best room for us.”

“I think I would enjoy that, Edward. Between sliding off the cliff, dealing with geologists and surveyors, the shooting, and subsequent burial, we didn’t have a chance to enjoy the mountains at all.”

“Far from it. But there’s so much to behold there. So much beauty, it takes my breath away. Just like you.”

*And he wanted to see it all one last time before he left New Hampshire.*

Dora smiled at the compliment. “People say the mountains in New Hampshire have incomparable beauty and I’ve always wanted to see them up close. How long can we stay?”

“About a week I think. And on the way back, we could locate the

geologist again and have him give you his report on Mount Webster.”

“With everything that’s happened, I had forgotten about his report.”

“Since there’s gold on Wyllie Mountain, perhaps there will be on your property as well.”

“If there is, can we have the same mine operator take care of my, excuse me, *our* mine too?”

“Perhaps. Once he gets Sam’s operation going, I don’t see why not.”

“How long do you think it will take for Catherine and Sam to get all of Mr. Forbes’ affairs in order?”

“I should think about another week or two,” he answered.

“Then let’s suggest that they visit us in Barrington one more time before they go back to Kentucky.”

“That’s a grand idea,” he agreed. “But...” He hesitated. What he was about to say would change their lives forever.

“But what?”

“Remember when I said I wanted to start over some place?”

“Yes, and I understood. You would like to move to Boston and live in my house,” she answered. “I assume you will be speaking with my former father-in-law, Mr. Williams, about buying it from him?”

Edward stared, not believing that she had so totally misunderstood him. Or did he somehow lead her to believe that was his intention?

She chattered on without pausing. “Or we could buy another house in Boston if you prefer. Or perhaps one a little further away from the city where we could have acreage enough for our horses. Doesn’t that sound heavenly? We will be so happy!”

She looked so animated and sounded so ecstatic, making plans and suggesting options with astonishing spontaneity.

“Would you have to sell your three stores if you move to Boston? They are doing so well, perhaps you should consider keeping them



and your house in Barrington. It's such a fine home. We could go there every other week or so. That would give us a chance to check on the mines. Maybe father could even come with us sometimes."

*Her father.*

He hadn't considered that she wouldn't want to leave him. She was an only child and he could tell Mr. Tudor was exceedingly close to Dora. And she adored her father. He could never ask her to abandon him, leaving Tudor alone in Boston with no family at all.

This would make everything more complicated. Sometimes life is remarkably simple, he mused, other times it's extraordinarily complicated.

Keeping Dora happy would always be his primary goal. That much was certain. But now that he knew what he wanted, was there a way to make himself happy too?

## CHAPTER 34

Their coach bumped and plodded along a series of switchbacks, passing dense forests on both sides as it traveled northward from Crawford Notch toward their honeymoon destination. Sugar maple, yellow birch, and beech trees were common around Crawford Notch, but as the grade steepened, birch, spruce, and balsam fir trees signified their transition to higher elevations.

Edward could smell the pungent pines and bayberries from the carriage window. He took a deep breath and then glanced over at Dora. From the other side of the carriage, she was watching the sunset splash color across the clouds in the western sky and illuminate the spectacular vistas. The sun's final rays bathed her in a warm golden color, like honey and oranges mixed together. The mere sight of her made him smile. She never looked more beautiful than she did at that moment.

Their maid must have helped her fix her hair in the latest fashion, because he'd never seen her wear it that way. Her auburn locks were swept up into a mound of curls and a single tight ringlet draped down the right side of her face reaching almost to her lovely chest. The simple hair style complimented the low neckline of her gown, made from an elegant green silk taffeta. The rich color matched the pine boughs they passed.

She rubbed her lower lip with her fingertip. Must her every movement remind him of how much he desired her?

He couldn't help but stare at the soft curves of her creamy breasts. Tonight he would take great pleasure in caressing those exquisite mounds and the rest of her luscious body.

She cleared her throat when she caught him staring at her. "This certainly is a nice coach," she said with a smile, as though she were trying to distract him.

"Nothing but the best for my beautiful bride." He sat across from her because when he sat next to Dora her nearness always kindled

fiery feelings that took a colossal effort to control. But now, unable to resist any longer, he moved next to her.

He ran a knuckle slowly across the voluptuous curves of her bosom and kissed her earlobe and neck.

She flushed but continued to chat in a playful voice. "And our coachman, Mr. Harper. What an agreeable man he is. He even brought along that nice lunch for us. You will have to reward him."

He knew what she was doing. Making him wait for tonight. The prolonged anticipation would just make being with her this evening all the sweeter.

"I will compensate him well," he said, continuing to give her affectionate kisses. "But mostly because he told me he has four young children. He's such a proud papa, he had to tell me all about each one as we loaded our bags. If I remember correctly, their names are Susan, Sally, Seth, and Simon."

"Will he come back for us?"

"He'll come back at the end of the week. And when we get back to Barrington, I'll be sure to tip him generously."

It suddenly grew dark as a gloomy cloud extinguished the sun's remaining light. That simple act of nature caused concern to escalate swiftly within him. The cloud's ominous appearance could mean menacing weather was approaching. And bad weather in the mountains was never good. Violent storms could develop with little or no warning.

Dora turned to him. "That doesn't look good."

"I agree. It's hard to estimate distance when traveling by coach, but I'm hoping we are only a couple of miles from the inn."

"I'll feel sorry for our driver if it starts to rain."

"As a coachman, he's used to rain," Edward said, trying to reassure her.

She was too smart to be easily assured. "But a cloud like that could mean high winds and hail as well."

"Indeed." He wasn't surprised when they heard the low rumble of thunder.

The carriage suddenly lurched forward and Dora grabbed his arm as the driver wisely called for greater speed from the horses. He tugged her closer to him and held her tight as the bouncing became more relentless.

When the air abruptly grew far colder, he asked, "Did you bring a coat?"

"Yes, but it's in one of my bags," she answered. "I didn't expect a storm. The weather was so nice when we left."

"You can wear mine," he said, indicating his long coat lying on the seat in front of them.

A tense silence fell between them as they watched the wind pick up making the boughs of pines swirl and spin in every direction. Then a sudden loud crack of lightning made Dora flinch.

"Easssy, easssy," they heard the coachman yell to the carriage team, dragging the words out as he attempted to calm them.

The anxious look on Dora's face told him she understood the danger they unexpectedly found themselves in.

A cold knot that had nothing to do with the temperature formed in Edward's stomach. Had he placed her in peril? He would never forgive himself if something happened to her on this trip.

The carriage he'd rented was a strong, closed vehicle with front and back axles connected by a long curved iron bar that supported the body of the coach. He hoped the construction was strong enough to withstand the storm's beating.

"Let's get that coat on you," he told her as he reached for the warm garment. He helped her into it and they both chuckled despite their anxiety when they noticed how long the sleeves were on her. The coat also reached to the coach's floor. "At least you'll be warm, if not fashionable."

"But what about you? You'll freeze."

"No, I'm hot-blooded, especially when I'm near you."

"That I believe. Sometimes, when I touch your skin, it nearly burns my fingers."

The thought of her slim fingers sliding against his skin made him

long for the bed that awaited them.

But the heat of his sensuous thought was soon extinguished by a cold driving rain that began to pour. He withdrew and latched the pull-up windows just in time. At once, the rain became hard, merciless, and torrential.

The storm grew steadily worse and the driver continuously yelled, "Trot On!" Despite the coachman's commands to speed up, the horses slowed more with every minute that passed. If the downpour didn't let up, the man would only be able to keep the team moving at little more than a crawl.

Edward peered out. The swaying and bending trees began to creak and groan as though protesting what was happening. He couldn't tell for sure but he thought they had been on Mountain View Road for some time. The newly widened road, not yet well established, grew more and more treacherous. The carriage began tilting frequently from side to side as the downpour quickly turned the road into a sea of mud.

The storm grew even angrier and unleashed high winds that threatened to level even the mightiest of the trees around them. The howling wind, hard and lashing, hammered the carriage and caused it to sway, squeak, and moan.

Dora's eyes widened and he could feel her hands trembling.

The carriage bounced and then sprang back as it hit a mud hole. Their bodies jerked sideways as a right wheel slipped downward and then another on the same side. They started tipping to that side.

They were going over.

The horses squealed and the driver yelled as the entire carriage tilted severely.

He saw terror in Dora's eyes. He grabbed her and hauled her against his chest. He wrapped her body in his and protected her head with his hands and face. They plunged downward landing on the right interior door as the coach crashed. The impact with the ground whacked them violently. Then the coach slipped a few more feet. He prayed they were not on the edge of ravine.

At once, the carriage rocked wildly as the terrified horses reacted to the coach's collapse and tried to free themselves.

Dora lay limply against his chest. "Dora, are you okay?" She didn't answer him.

She must have fainted. He couldn't blame her. As they'd crashed, he'd cushioned her head with his chest so he didn't think she'd been knocked out. He could feel a bump rising on the back of his own head, though, but he didn't think he had any other injuries.

"Mr. Harper," he shouted as the carriage continued to be jostled about by the panicked horses. "Coachman, are you all right?"

But again, he got no answer. He needed to get out and help the man. He could be trapped under the carriage.

Rain poured into the inside of the carriage and onto them from the opened door above him. The force of the crash must have flung it open. He gently slid out from under Dora and eased her away from the broken window glass beneath them. He supported her head with one of the seat cushions. He didn't want to risk getting her out until he knew what the situation was. He quickly heaved himself up and crawled out the open carriage door.

Instantly, his face bore the bitter bite of the wind and the sting of the slashing rain. He closed the door to keep any more of the rain from landing on Dora and then jumped down. Mud splattered on him as he hit the ground.

He peered into the darkness and through the rain. The coach sat in a low spot but, thankfully, there were only woods beyond it. He tried to spot Mr. Harper, but saw no sign of the coachman.

His first priority was to calm the nervous horses. If they spooked, they would drag the carriage, with Dora inside, behind them. The coach could break apart and she could be killed. But calming four twelve-hundred pound animals could prove problematic. He prayed there would be no further lightning strikes directly above them.

He decided to focus on one of the two in front. The eyes of one gleamed with wild terror, so he eased up to the one next to him. If he could calm one horse, the others would calm too. Moving carefully to the front of the big horse, he reached up for his bridle, endeavoring to not get kicked by hooves or knocked out by the horse's head. "Whoa, whoa now. That's a goooood boy. We've been through a rough patch, but we'll get this all righted in just a minute. Easssy now. Easssy."

The big gelding began to calm at the sound of his voice. The

horse lowered his head and ceased lurching and trembling. The other three followed the gelding's lead and settled somewhat. He kept speaking soothingly to all of them, loud enough for the horses to hear over the incessant rain. Soon, the four stood still, waiting for someone to tell them what to do.

He needed to figure out what to do. *What would Sam do?* he asked himself. Then he knew. Sam would formulate a plan.

Edward considered their situation for a few moments. He still held the big horse's rein tightly in his hands. Continuing to talk to the four, he began unhitching the team before they could drag the carriage away, with Dora in it. He set about releasing the leathers and removing the harnesses. As each horse was freed it ran off a short ways. He suspected they would not run far from the coachman that fed them so well from the looks of them.

With the first priority taken care off, next he needed to find the coachman. But where was the man? The darkness and heavy rain made it difficult to see. He expanded his search, looking in the direction the carriage fell. He spotted Mr. Harper lying face down in the mud about fifteen feet from the coach. He rushed to the coachman's side, hoping the poor man had just been knocked out by the fall.

He turned Harper over and the fellow moaned. *Thank God*, he was alive. A severe gash had splayed open the man's eyebrow and another had cut the top of his ear open. He checked him for further injuries but only found one—the top of one of his fingers was gone—undoubtedly torn off by a rein that had tightened around it during the fall. He dug out his handkerchief and, protecting the wound from the rain with his own body, he wrapped it tightly around the man's finger. Then he stuck Harper's hand inside the man's coat to keep the bandage dry. Satisfied that the wound was covered, he dragged the driver toward higher ground so he wouldn't be lying in standing water. He leaned him against a large tree trunk whose thick boughs would shield the man from most of the rain.

He raced back to Dora hoping she had woken by now. He reached for the step below the carriage door and used it to pull himself upward. He scrambled up and flung the door open. Once inside, he shut the door again. The glass on that side was cracked but still intact.

He knelt down and relief surged through him when Dora's

eyelashes fluttered.

“Edward?”

“I’m here, darling. Our coach crashed. I’m just fine, but I think you fainted.”

She shook her head and he helped her to sit up. “What about the driver?”

“He’s injured, but he’s alive.”

“The horses?”

“I freed them. Are you injured?” he asked.

“No, nothing hurts. Are you sure you’re all right?” She ran her hands up his arms and then across his wet face.

“Yes, I’m fine. But we need to get help for the coachman. He’s badly injured and laying out there in the rain. I don’t think he’ll be able to ride.”

“Look, there’s a lap robe made of buffalo hide. It must have been folded under that seat. We can use it as a blanket,” she suggested, pointing.

Edward dragged the lap robe out. “This should work well.”

“We can also use these seat cushions to make a bed for him so he’s not lying on wet ground.”

“Another good idea,” he said. “Keep thinking, perhaps you’ll get us out of this mess.”

“How far off are the horses?” she asked.

“They’re fairly close. When he loaded our luggage, I noticed a bag full of sweet feed on the back. I can use some of that to try to lure a couple of them back I think.”

“Good. Maybe we can ride them up to the inn, get a wagon, and come back for the driver.”

“You stay here while I try to get the horses. The sight of your skirt billowing in the wind might spook them. They’re understandably skittish right now,” he told her.



Edward wrapped the cushions in the buffalo hide to keep them dry and then pulled himself out the door. Before jumping down, Dora handed the hide and cushions up to him. He closed the door and jumped off with the bundle clutched in his arms. He stumbled but managed not to lose his balance completely.

He rushed over to the coachman and got him situated on the cushions and then covered with the warm hide. He looked around for the fellow's tricorne, found it, and pushed it down on his head to keep the rain off of the man's face. "Sir, if you can hear me, I'm going to go for help. Stay here."

The coachman nodded slowly. "Take my best horse. The one with the big white star on his head. He's gentle and he'll take care of you." Harper paused to take a breath. "His name is Jupiter. He can carry you both."

Harper's voice grew weaker with each word and the fellow passed out again at once.

"Hold on, Mr. Harper. You've got four children waiting for you at home." He tugged the hide up to the man's chin, tucked it securely around him on both sides.

Edward sprinted to the carriage to get the feed to lure Jupiter. Once he retrieved the horse, he would help Dora get out and they could be on their way to the inn.

He needed to hurry.

## CHAPTER 35

Dora wrapped her arms securely around Edward and rested her head on his back as they took off on Jupiter headed for the inn. The scent of wet wool and wet horse filled her nose. The soaked fabric of his jacket chilled the skin of her cheek but the solid feel of Edward's back gave her a sense of security despite the conditions.

She hoped Edward would not suffer too much without his coat. Even wearing his heavy woolen coat, her fingers and toes ached with cold.

"Are you all right back there?" he shouted.

"Yes," she yelled back. "How far?"

"I'm guessing about two miles."

Jagged bolts of lightning splayed across the sky to the north followed only a few heartbeats later by the boom of thunder. The wind howled and the rain wailed. Another rumble of thunder followed closely on the heels of the sharp crack and dazzling flash of forked lightning. She prayed they would not be hit by one of the bolts.

With Edward's soothing encouragement, Jupiter seemed to be largely unaffected by the terrible weather except that beneath her legs she felt his hips tighten with each lightning crash. And, now and then, a hoof slipped on the slick mud. The footing became even more treacherous when the incline grew steeper. She kept a firm grip on Edward as she struggled to stay on top of the intrepid horse while he braved the storm.

All around them, lightning continued to splatter the sky. Each fiery bolt rattled her nerves a little bit more. At least the lightning provided some light. Between each bolt, visibility was poor. She hoped Edward could keep the horse on the barely visible trail. If they got lost now, it could be disastrous.

They passed pines uprooted by the high winds or battered and

beaten, leaning on their neighboring hardwoods. Dora prayed the storm would not send the towering trees crashing down on top of them. She knew Edward would be listening for the sound of cracking wood that would signal the raw power of the wind ripping a mighty tree from the earth's embrace.

Although she clung close to Edward's broad back, a numbing cold began to grip her heart. The raging wind bit at her face and stung her eyes, narrowed to keep out the pelting rain. Edward's coat grew so weighty on her back and shoulders, she felt as though she were carrying a heavy load. Gusts of wind ripped at her new hairdo. She'd had it fixed that way because she wanted to look stylish and elegant for Edward. Now, though, she was sure it looked more like a wet wharf rat's nest. All her careful grooming before they left had been for naught. But she didn't care. She just wanted them to make it to the inn safely and get help for the poor coachman.

When the road cut through a natural pass, water began cascading over the hillsides and boulders on either side of them and then turned into swiftly moving channels rushing downhill. If the storm kept up, they would soon turn the road into a river.

Despite her best efforts to remain brave, she began to earnestly fear the storm. What dangers lay ahead? She prayed they would be able to reach help at the inn and that their driver would survive the downpour until they could return.

Her dreams of a romantic evening were drowning with the storm. She stifled the tears that threatened. She was wet enough without tears too.

Then Edward reached down and placed a hand on top of her clasped hands, which she held tightly across his stomach. With just that simple touch, reminding her that he was there, her heart cheered. Things were going to be all right. She wasn't alone any more.

No longer was she a lonely widow. Edward was her husband. Together they would brave this storm and any others that came their way.



Edward peered ahead. He could just make out a pinpoint size light in the distance. It had to be the inn. At least he prayed it would be. The light's glow grew steadily larger with each step of the big

horse. Its radiance soon lit up his heart more than the sun on the prettiest day he could remember.

“There it is!” he shouted. “We’re going to be all right Dora.”

Dora peered around his shoulder. “Thank God,” she yelled loudly enough to be heard.

He pulled the horse to a stop near the inn’s door, dismounted, helped Dora down, and then tied Jupiter. “Thank you, big boy,” he said with a quick stroke on the horse’s long neck.

He escorted Dora up onto the porch and pounded on the thick wooden door.

Moments later, a middle-aged man opened the door. A woman holding up an oil lamp stood behind him. “Come in, come in. Get out of this terrible storm. You poor folks,” the man said.

Dora stepped inside and then stared down in dismay. Soaked, they were both dripping puddles of water onto the entryway floor.

“Don’t worry yourself about a little water. We’ll get a rag in a minute,” the woman said in a kind voice.

They helped Dora, shivering with chill and fatigue, out of the heavy coat and hung it by the door. The upper part of her gown was still intact but the frilly skirt was ripped in several places.

Edward removed his wet jacket and then his tricorne and placed it on a hat rack.

The kind lady tossed some rags beneath the dripping clothing. “Come stand by the hearth. Both of you.” She ushered them into the large parlor and over to the welcome sight of a roaring fire and snug room.

The friendly innkeeper smiled and said, “I’m William Dodge and this is my wife Mary Jane.”

“I’m Edward Wyllie of Barrington and this is my new bride Dora.”

“Yes, Mr. Wyllie, we were expecting you. We received your request for a room. I saved our newly added suite for you,” Dodge told him.

“We need your help, Sir,” Edward implored. “Our coach crashed a few miles back and the driver was thrown. He’s badly injured.”

“Good heavens! What’s the coachman’s name?” Dodge asked.

“Mr. Harper,” Dora answered.

“We know Mr. Harper well,” Mrs. Dodge said. “We give him lodging at no cost in exchange for bringing our guests up here.” Mrs. Dodge turned and disappeared down the hall.

“We can worry about righting the coach later, but do you have a wagon I could borrow now to take down there to retrieve him?” Edward asked.

“Indeed, I do. I’ll go with you,” Dodge volunteered. “It would be best for me to handle my team in this storm.”

Edward’s face creased with concern. “Sir, I must warn you. This is no ordinary thunderstorm. It’s one of the worst I’ve seen. Water is pouring down the sides of the road and it may even be washed out entirely by now. You had better let me go by myself.”

“No, Sir. If that’s the case, you’ll need me even more. You’ll need help lifting Harper into the wagon, especially if he’s badly injured. And Mr. Harper is a friend. A friend in need,” Dodge said.

“I’ll be grateful for your help, Sir. Especially in these conditions.”

Dodge grabbed a long wool coat and a hat, donned them, and said, “We’re used to bad storms up here, Mr. Wyllie. Drink some coffee and then we’ll go get that poor man before he freezes to death. I’ll put that horse you rode in one of my stable’s stalls and then ready the wagon.” Dodge lifted another heavy coat from a hook. “Here’s a dry coat for you to wear.”

“Thank you, Sir. That horse is one of Mr. Harper’s carriage team. I think the other three stayed with their owner.”

Mrs. Dodge thrust a warm cup of coffee into Edward’s hands and he accepted it gratefully. “Drink this while my husband gets his wagon hitched up.” Then she gave one to Dora too. “I’ll go get a stack of towels and a blanket for you Mr. Wyllie.” She disappeared again.

He took a sip of the coffee. “Get warm my sweet,” Edward told Dora. “I’ll be back before your toes thaw out.” He blew on the coffee and took a bigger gulp.

“Please be careful,” she said and gave him a soft kiss. “For luck and love.”

“Another one of those kisses and I could brave any storm.”

He ignored the rain that pelted against the window panes and the wind that whistled as she kissed him again.



The storm mercifully died down not long after they left and Dora let out a long breath of relief.

Mrs. Dodge lent her a warm robe to change into and gave her a towel to dry her hair. After she helped Dora pull all the pins out and comb it, Mrs. Dodge went to bed.

Dora stayed up waiting for Edward by the parlor hearth, despite feeling achy and exhausted. She pressed both hands over her burning eyes and then picked up the second cup of coffee Mrs. Dodge had given her. The bit of brandy the innkeeper added to it warmed her insides. Curled up under a quilt in a comfortable upholstered chair, she sat in front of the blazing fire, and gave some thought to what Edward had told her about starting over in a new place.

The more she thought about it, the more she realized he had never said anything about moving to Boston. *Had she jumped to that conclusion?* If she had, she wondered what he *was* thinking. Did he mean a new house? A new business? Or a new location? How could she have been so self-absorbed? She'd only been thinking of what she wanted—a home and family with Edward. But as long as they were together, she could have that anywhere.

Except for...her father. She could never leave him.

She threw several logs on the hearth fire and then several more before she finally heard them returning.

She raced to the door, threw it open, and watched as they carried Mr. Harper into the inn.

“We’ll take him down the hall and to the left,” Dodge told them.

Edward supported Harper by his shoulders and Mr. Dodge held Harper by his boots. The innkeeper shuffled backwards as he guided them toward the room.

Mrs. Dodge soon emerged, dressed in her robe. "Is he injured badly?"

"Don't know yet, but he still hasn't come around," Edward said.

"I do all the doctoring up here," she explained. "I'll go get my healing kit. Take off his wet clothes before you put him in the bed."

"We will, Mary Jane," her husband answered.

"I'll just wait by the hearth then," Dora told them. "Please call me if I can help."

"No, it's all right. Come along," Mr. Dodge told her. "He needs our help more than he needs modesty."

She followed them, opened the door to the room, and then began turning down the bed covers and lighting candles. With nothing else she could do to help, she sat down on the far side of the room.

The two men laid Harper on the rug next to the bed and, hidden from her view, took off all of his wet clothes. While Dodge went to retrieve a dry nightshirt from his own room, Edward dried Harper off as best he could with a towel.

"The buffalo robe and the coach's cushions helped to keep him warm, Dora. Those were excellent suggestions and may have saved his life," Edward told her.

"I hope so," she said.

After they put the dry nightshirt on Harper, they laid the coachman on the bed and Dora covered him with the warm bedding.

Mrs. Dodge came in and sat down next to Harper and began tending to his wounds. "Doesn't look too serious. He'll come around by morning. There's nothing more you two can do," she told Edward and Dora, rinsing out a blood-stained cloth in a bowl of water. "Husband, take these poor weary travelers to their room so they can get some rest."

Edward spoke to Mr. Dodge. "I'll go get our bags out of your wagon first." Then he turned to Dora. "I retrieved them from the coach."

That news thrilled her. At least she would have fresh clothes to change into in the morning.

“I’ll help,” Mr. Dodge said. “Then I’ll show you where your room is and we can get a nice warm fire going in there.”

The two men hurried out and Dora stood next to Mrs. Dodge.

The matronly looking woman smiled up at her. “Not much of a honeymoon so far, eh?”

“No, Mrs. Dodge, it has not been.”

“Don’t you worry. There’s plenty of time left for romance. What counts is that you’re married and you seem to have found yourself an exceptionally fine specimen of a man.” The woman raised her brow and then winked.

Dora giggled, despite her fatigue. “I would have to agree with you, Mrs. Dodge.”

When the kind woman finished stitching up Harper’s eyebrow, she said, “Hand me a clean cloth from my bag.” Mrs. Dodge rinsed and dried her hands and then proceeded to sew up the coachman’s split ear. She put salve on the injured finger and tied a dressing around it. It looked terribly painful, but mercifully the man only groaned a few times and never woke.

“Are you hungry, dear?”

“No, just terribly tired.” She handed Mrs. Dodge another cloth.

“I hope you like your room. I think it’s quite romantic. Just let us know if you need anything.”

She just needed sleep. And Edward.



## CHAPTER 36

He whistled notes of a Blue Jay outside their window woke Dora. She remembered the terrible storm, finally arriving at the inn, and then falling asleep wearing Mrs. Dodge's warm robe the second her head hit the pillow. It wasn't the first night of a honeymoon she'd anticipated, but Edward had seemed just as exhausted. In fact, he still slept soundly.

She stood, slid one of the room's heavy drapes aside, and peered out hoping to see the perky crest and blue, white, and black plumage of one of her favorite birds. Instead, she drew in a sharp breath, astonished by the view. A glorious series of snowcapped peaks surrounded Mountain View Inn. They jutted out against a brilliant blue cloudless sky, a stark contrast to the night before. The heavens now radiated only a sense of peace.

She'd seen some of these same mountains from a distance while they were in Crawford Notch, but certainly not the entire range and never from a better vantage point than this. She'd never seen anything more magnificent. The picturesque mountains seemed to display a strength beyond anything else on earth. The sight filled her with a sense of majesty—the splendor of God's ability to create—displayed right before her eyes.

"They make you feel small, don't they?" Edward said, coming up behind her and placing his hands on her shoulders.

She let out a long sigh. "Actually, no. These mountains make me realize just how much beauty the good Lord has gifted us. If He's given us all of those to enjoy," she said gesturing to the tall peaks, "we must be quite special in His eyes."

Edward turned her around and his face grew serious. "I know *you* are quite special. You are the finest gift ever given to me." He kissed her softly and drew her against his chest. "I love you Dora Wyllie. You are a joy to wake up to every day."

She fancied hearing her new name. "And I love you Edward

Wyllie.”

“Shall we get dressed and see what Mrs. Dodge has cooked up for breakfast? Then we can come back here to rest.” The roguish smile on his face made it clear he had no intention of resting.

“Yes, let’s do. My stomach is growling since we skipped our evening meal. Mmm, I can smell coffee brewing and something wonderful baking.”

They had pulled their damp clothes out of their bags to dry last night and they were scattered all about. Now that the garments were dry, they gathered them up and hung them in the sizable mahogany wardrobe. The large room’s rich furnishings and bedding, drapes and pillows in shades of pink and cherry fabrics suited Dora perfectly. A small round table for two occupied the space next to the window. A crystal vase in the table’s center held fresh wildflowers. “This is a lovely romantic room,” she told him as she tried to fix her hair. She soon gave up and decided to just braid it.

Edward nodded. “I was too tired last night to notice the room. That was the worst storm I have ever endured. I hope our coachman is feeling better this morning.”

They dressed quickly and hurried to the dining room.

Mr. Harper sat with Mr. Dodge at a table large enough to seat ten people. They were having breakfast and, from the smell of it, coffee.

Both men smiled at them when they entered.

“Good morning, Mr. and Mrs. Wyllie,” Harper greeted.

Relieved to see him, Dora declared, “Oh, Mr. Harper, thank the Lord you are all right!”

“Indeed,” Edward agreed. “We were both worried.”

“Thanks to you two, and Mr. and Mrs. Dodge here, I lived to see another day and, more importantly, my family.”

“How do you feel?” Dora asked.

“These two spots on my head are sore and my finger is quite painful. However, I feel well enough and I’ll heal soon. Mrs. Dodge gave me laudanum for the pain.”

“Delighted to hear you’re doing well, Sir,” Edward said. “I’m sorry about what happened to your coach. And your fingertip.”

“These things happen in my line of work. It won’t be the last spill I take. From what Mr. Dodge described, the coach should only need minor repairs.”

“Well, I will gladly help you right the coach today and round up your other horses,” Edward offered. “And assist with any repairs that are necessary.”

“Thank you, Sir. Your help would be most appreciated.”

“I’ll help too,” Mr. Dodge offered. “And our four servants will be arriving shortly from Whitefield. The two men can also help us. We can all leave right after breakfast.”

As soon as they sat down and got settled, Mrs. Dodge served them a hearty breakfast of eggs, pancakes, bacon and sausages. A delectable aroma wafted through the air as she placed a couple of hot pancakes on Dora’s plate. She must have risen before dawn to have provided them with such a bountiful breakfast.

The view of the White Mountains from the dining table took Dora’s breath away once again. “What’s that largest peak?” she asked Mrs. Dodge.

The woman came over and stood behind Dora’s chair and looked out the large window too. “That is the crowning glory of the mountain range—Mount Washington, named for General Washington even before he became President. I never get tired of looking at it.”

Her husband, wearing a plaid work shirt, poured everyone more coffee and then looked out the window himself. “It’s said to be home to Pagegochuk, the Great Spirit. It’s the highest peak in the northeast. The natives call the mountain Agiocochook. Roughly translated, it means home of the Great Spirit.”

“I believe you must have the best view of any home anywhere,” Edward said.

“That’s why we decided to build the inn here,” Mr. Dodge explained. “We close up during the worst winter months and go visit our grown children.”

“Do you have any other guests staying now?” Edward asked Mr. Dodge.

“No, we have two couples coming this Saturday. For now, you, Mrs. Wyllie, and Mr. Harper are our only guests.”

“Is it safe to walk and hike near here?” Dora asked. She was anxious to take some walks and find some privacy.

“Yes, as long as Mr. Wyllie takes his pistol. And a rifle if you want to hike up into the foothills. You never know when you might encounter a black bear or mountain cat up there,” Dodge said. “Did you bring a rifle, Mr. Wyllie.?”

“No, I didn’t. Just my pistol.”

“You can borrow one of mine. I have a nice collection hanging by the front door,” Dodge offered. “It’s peaceful here. Whitefield is home to more sheep than people.”

“I can pack a picnic for you tomorrow. It’s going to be terribly muddy out there today. But the day promises to be sunny and it should dry out fast,” Mrs. Dodge said. “I serve our honeymooning guests dinner in their room around 6:30 p.m. If that’s all right with you two.”

Dora nodded her head in agreement and Edward answered for them. “That sounds perfect, Mrs. Dodge. We’ll wait until tomorrow afternoon for our first picnic, so I can help Mr. Harper this morning, but dinner in our room would be splendid.”

Dora yawned and rubbed her heavy eyes. “I’m afraid our ordeal in the storm has left me feeling fatigued.”

“That’s understandable. You endured quite an ordeal. Perhaps you had better take it easy for a few days,” Mr. Dodge advised her.

“While we’re taking care of the carriage, why don’t you get some rest,” Edward suggested. His steady gaze riveted on her face, then discretely roamed over the rest of her body.

She glanced away and struggled not to blush in front of the innkeepers. “Perhaps that would be wise. This big meal has made me a bit drowsy.”

They both thanked Mrs. Dodge for her warm hospitality and marvelous breakfast.

After Edward left with the other men, she made her way back to their room wondering if the honeyed part of her honeymoon would

ever get started.

## CHAPTER 37

Fortunately, the only major damage to the coach was one cracked wheel. And since the driver always kept a spare on the carriage, they were able to get it fixed in no time.

After the five men righted the carriage and they hitched the team up again, Mr. Harper didn't feel up to driving his coach. Edward volunteered to drive and let the coachman sit in the back. It was a small sacrifice to make and he was glad he could help.

Harper had ridden Jupiter down to the coach. The big horse was now harnessed to the carriage with the rest of the team. Mr. Dodge tied the two mounts he and Edward had ridden to the back and climbed up next to him. Dodge's two servants rode their horses ahead of them.

The road, filled with mud holes and strewn with leaves, twigs, and broken branches, was difficult to traverse so Edward kept a sharp eye out and took it slow, gingerly guiding the team around the worst parts with the help of Mr. Dodge. The two servants would occasionally have to dismount to move a tree limb off the road.

The five men soon returned to the inn. After Dodge assured the coachman that he would take good care of the horses, Edward assisted Harper into the inn.

"I'm fine truly," Harper insisted, "just a little light-headed and my finger is throbbing."

"You probably have a mild head injury from being thrown from the carriage," Edward said. "You need more rest."

"I wanted to go back to Barrington today. My wife will be worried sick," Harper told him. "But I don't think I can make it."

"I think it would be a mistake for you to go anywhere so soon. Wait a few days. She'll figure out that the storm must have delayed you or washed out the road."

“Perhaps you’re right. This morning, I thought I was fine. But now I realize how weak I am. If I’m going to be here a few days, I must send my wife a missive. I wonder when the mail carrier comes next.”

“I’ll check with Mrs. Dodge to see.” He made sure Harper got comfortably settled in his room and then found Mrs. Dodge in the inn’s kitchen. “We’re back Mrs. Dodge.” A delicious aroma of apples and cinnamon filled the air.

“Did everything go all right? Did you bring the coach back?” she asked.

“Yes, we did. Your husband is taking care of the horses now. I just helped Mr. Harper to his room. He badly needs some rest.”

“I’ll bring a meal to him on a tray in just a minute,” she said. “And he’ll need some more pain killer by now.”

“When does the mail carrier come again?”

“In about two hours, although all the mud might make it three,” she answered. “Do you need to send a missive?”

“No, Mr. Harper does. To his wife. He needs to stay a few days to recover.”

“Then I’ll bring him paper, quill, and ink.”

“I’ll take it to him,” he volunteered.

She gathered the writing materials and Edward brought them to Harper’s room and then waited for him to write his wife a note before returning it to Mrs. Dodge.

“He wrote his wife that he’s going to stay three more days,” Edward told her.

“That’s wise. All that jostling around on top of that coach wouldn’t be good for the man’s wounds or his addled brain.”

“And it will give the road a chance to dry out. Might I impose on you to have a bath brought to our room?” he asked. “Regrettably, I was unable to avoid a good deal of the mud out there.” Grinning, he surveyed his mud-spattered clothing. “I wiped my boots off before coming in, but I’m afraid I’m still quite grubby.”

“Certainly, Sir. I’ll have one brought to your room right away with extra warm water and towels. I just took your lovely wife a large pitcher of fresh drinking water. Would you like a meal brought to your room too?”

“No, after that big breakfast, I think we’d both prefer to wait for our romantic meal tonight. How about a piece of that pie though?” He pointed to three apple pies sitting on the long wooden counter. “I’m afraid their enticing fragrance has prompted an uncontrollable longing for a piece.”

Mrs. Dodge grinned and wiped her hands on her apron. “Let’s cut two big pieces. Mrs. Wyllie will need some nourishment too.”

Carrying the pie plates in each hand, he tapped on the door to their room with the toe of his boot.

“Who is it?” Dora called.

“I’m here to deliver a honeymoon. Did you order one?”

She flung the door open and her eyes widened at the sight of the pie slices. “Those don’t look like a honeymoon to me!”

“I shall take them back then,” he said, and pivoted around.

“No! They can be *part* of the honeymoon.”

He forced a serious look to his face. “Well, if you’re absolutely sure,” he told her and turned back to follow her into the room. “I ordered a bath for us too.”

“You look like you need one,” she said, taking in his grimy face and clothing.

“We had to change a wheel on the coach. It was a messy affair.”

“Did you get the carriage upright?”

“Yes, we had to use Dodge’s ropes and the horses’ brawn to get the coach back on the road, but with some difficulty we finally managed it. It’s here and Harper’s horses too.”

“I’m so glad. How’s he doing?”

“I think he’ll be fine. I convinced him to stay a few days. He needs rest.”



She cupped his cheek tenderly in her warm hand. “So do you, for that matter.”

He handed a slice of pie to her, then sat down, and took a forkful, savoring the taste of the still warm flaky crust, apple slices, and thick cinnamon juice. He swallowed and said, “You can have the bathwater first, of course.”

Dora sat down too and asked playfully, “What are you going to do while I take my bath?” She’d braided her hair and the rich auburn plait hung down her left side. She took the end and brushed it across her lips, ignoring the pie for the moment.

“I will do anything you’d like, my bride.”

“I’d prefer for you to do what I like while we’re dry.” She smiled wickedly. “The storm poured enough water between us to last me a good while.”

She took a bite of the pie and rolled her eyes in delight.

While he savored his own piece, Edward watched her until she’d cleaned the last drop of juice from her fork with her soft pink tongue.

She licked her lips slowly as she set the plate down. “That was heavenly.”

His own lips began to throb with a need to kiss her. He wished they would hurry that tub and water along. Before long, he wouldn’t be able to answer the door.

Thankfully, his wish was promptly granted. They heard a knock on the door and someone called, “Your bath, Mr. Wyllie.”

“Thank you. Please come in,” he told the servants, a woman and the same two men who helped right the coach. The woman carried the tub and sat it on the thick rug in front of the hearth. The other two each carried two large buckets. Steam rose as they poured the water. Edward’s muscles ached to feel the water’s warmth. The heat from the hearth’s fire would help keep the water warm.

“We’ll be back with four more buckets in a twinkling, Sir,” one of the men said.

“Mrs. Dodge asked me to give you these rags to clean your clothing and boots. If you need something laundered, just let us know,” the woman told him. “If you’re done with your pie, she

wanted me to take your plates back to the kitchen.”

He handed the dishes to the woman. “Thank you. Please tell Mrs. Dodge her apple pie was the best I’ve ever tasted.”

The two men were soon back. After all the buckets were poured, except two to use for rinsing, the servants left.

As soon as Edward turned the key to lock the door, Dora began undressing, grinning mischievously.

Legs crossed comfortably in front of him, he relaxed against one of the cushy chairs and watched.

When she removed her silk chemise and underdrawers, he literally gasped in delight, which made her smile.

Her seductive figure was curving and her legs exceptionally long. The fire heightened the sheen of her skin making it look like lustrous satin. Her eyes appeared darker than normal. The fiery desire he saw in them held him motionless and spellbound while she pinned up her hair.

Recovering, he helped her into the tub and then began his shave. He hadn’t shaved since they left Barrington yesterday morning. It seemed a long time ago. When he finished, he cleaned his clothing and boots, watching her out of the corner of his eyes until she’d finished. She stood up slowly, her slim body dripping. Immediately, he abandoned his garments, and snatched the towel up before she could.

He took great pleasure in drying off every last drop.

Then he slipped into the tub and washed himself well. Too anxious to linger overly long in the bath, he was soon dry. He put a few more logs in the hearth, slid into the bed, and scooted up next to his gorgeous wife. His flesh met hers in a warm press.

For a minute, he simply relished the privacy and intimacy of the moment. Secluded from the world, he held her close.

She inhaled deeply, seeming to relish his clean scent.

He began brushing little unhurried kisses against her lips, needing to feel their velvet warmth. Then he cuddled her mouth with his. She tasted of cinnamon and apples. And love.

She gripped the back of his head, trying to bring him even closer

and then ran her hand down his back and along his thigh.

Everywhere she touched, Edward's skin tingled and awakened, as though the tips of her fingers emitted a form of scintillating magic. Her magic, so powerful, so alluring, so sacred, literally transformed him.

His heart beat fully. His mind rejoiced. His soul felt whole.

Only within her embrace did he feel truly alive. The magic of her love brought him back to life. Glorious, wonderful life. Once again, because of her, he had everything to live for.

She buried her face against his chest and her uneven breaths were hot against his skin. She trailed kisses up his chest, his neck, and his ears, then onto his eyelids and finally to his eagerly awaiting lips.

Her fervor soon enfolded him in a haze of desire. His mind clouded further as ardor enveloped him completely. He had to fight against it to remain in control. He already wanted to yield to this bewitching sorceress, to place himself at the mercy of her hidden and most irresistible charms. The shapely beauty of her body taunted him, daring him to take her now.

First, though, he would conjure his own magic. But he would not summon this incantation with words. He began caressing her—touching, hugging, embracing—finding new ways to mesmerize her. To cast his own spell on her. To show his love for each part of her body.

Because he adored her.

Relishing the sweet taste of her, his lips explored Dora's soft ivory flesh. With her breasts pressed against his chest, his hands fondled her until her limbs clung to him and her hands clutched him to her. But he kept on, until she writhed beneath him, her body besieged by her growing arousal.

Breathing deeply, she hung on desperately, frantically, knowing only he could save her from passion's unbreakable spell. A spell every bit as powerful as the storm they survived last night.

Her impatience raged making her tremble and gasp.

She would soon have to yield to love's magical powers.

And so would he. Enchantingly. Joyously. Blissfully.

## CHAPTER 38

Dora was in heaven. She had finally gotten her honeymoon. Each of the last three days they'd picnicked at a different stunningly beautiful spot by day and enjoyed intimate little dinners, candlelight, and wine by night.

On each day, when they strolled and talked for hours, she planned to discuss where they would live. However, each day she found that her heart only wanted to think about Edward and learning what was important to him. There would be time for such thoughts later, when they would plan their future together.

She'd enjoyed hearing more about her husband's family, both the ones he'd lost here in New Hampshire and the ones living in Kentucky.

He'd told her that his life with his wife Anne and their children seemed like it belonged to someone else now. A part of the distant past that ended sadly. Although he would remember each of them fondly, that part of his life was over. He wanted only to focus on his future with Dora.

When she'd asked about each of his brothers, his face lit with a sunny cheerfulness.

She was especially intrigued by his description of Bear, their adopted brother. She couldn't wait to meet the giant Scotsman and his brave wife Artis, who had overcome such terrible hardships. And she wanted to meet William, the handsome sheriff, who'd rescued and later married a young woman named Kelly.

When he came to John, Edward would only say that John had been an architect and builder and that he was Little John's father. She wondered what had happened that resulted in Sam and Catherine adopting Little John, but she didn't press him. She would find out in time when he was ready to tell her.

When he described his youngest brother, Stephen, who showed the courage to take his wife Jane and four daughters to Kentucky to

make a better life for them, she could hear the admiration in Edward's voice. When he'd finished telling Stephen's story, she'd smiled, appreciating the youngest brother's intrepid spirit and abundant courage. Stephen seemed to be the most daring, adventure-loving, brother of the bunch.

And, of course, there was Sam and Catherine. She'd grown to love both as a brother and sister. Sam was the type of man you would want by your side if you ever faced danger. And Catherine, despite her noble blood and wealth, was one of the most humble, loving women she'd ever known.

Today, she hoped they would discuss their future. They found a secluded picnic area among some trees and spread their blanket beneath the soft white blossoms of a blooming dogwood tree. The sound of a nearby swiftly moving brook and a tiny waterfall made a charming and relaxing backdrop.

After they'd eaten the sumptuous picnic Mrs. Dodge prepared for them, Dora tried unsuccessfully to stifle a yawn. "You kept me up most of the night. I can't seem to stay awake."

"Oh no you don't. We didn't come here to sleep. The scenery is too gorgeous, the weather is spectacular, and I have you." Edward reached for her hand and kissed it.

"What are you going to do to keep me awake then?" Her pulse quickened at the speculation.

A gleam lit his eyes. "You had better not look at me like that or you'll find out right here in the middle of the wild."

It was a teasing challenge, but she heard serious passion in his voice.

A curious pull tugged at her insides, making her stomach quiver. Coupling here would be positively scandalous and outrageous. It was also tantalizingly tempting. He was so handsome. And his impressive body exuded such strength and warmth. She couldn't look at Edward without wanting him.

He gathered her in his arms, cradling her, and it made her feel small and feminine as he pressed her body against his broad chest.

The warmth she found within his embrace was so comforting, so longed-for, so arousing. She settled back, enjoying the feel of his

strong arms, his lips, and his entire body.

When she realized he meant to couple right here, out in the open, it became a purely sensual experience. Like creatures in the wild, they were mating. Their primal need for each other overwhelming their sense of propriety, making it all the more thrilling as she abandoned everything in the world but her desire for him. Freed of all restraint, she experienced only unfathomable profound joy.



As they hiked further, Edward's senses heightened, making him aware of every scent, sound, and sight around them. The purity and beauty of the wilderness made him feel completely at peace for the first time in a long time.

He was certain the Kentucky wilderness would offer this same sense of rightness. He hoped he could make Dora understand. The time had come to discuss their future. "Remember what you told Mr. and Mrs. Forbes about building a nation?" he asked as they strolled.

"Yes."

"It may not have reached them, but it did me."

Dora, stopped and looked up at him.

He took hold of her hand. "You have given me the courage and desire to go west—to see what the two of us can do to help build this country."

"You've always had the courage. It just wasn't the right time for you. If you hadn't delayed going, we would have never met."

"True, if I had gone then, we would have forever missed each other and all the love we share. But no, I didn't have the courage then. I'm ashamed to admit it, but at the time, I just didn't. I was overly cautious. For some reason, I lacked the pluck and daring of my brothers. And I didn't possess their willingness to step out on faith. Now, though, perhaps because I think we both need a new beginning, I want to go more than anything. When the good Lord gave me you, I also received a willingness to trust in an unknown future—our future. Because of your belief in me, I now have the courage."

She gazed lovingly into his eyes. "I do believe in you. And I

admire you. But most of all, I love you. I never knew what love meant until I met you.”

“And our love is the most important thing in my life. But I’ve missed my brothers. Being around Sam and almost losing him has made me realize just how much they all mean to me. Since you don’t have any brothers or sisters, you might not understand.”

“I do understand. A part of you is missing,” she said. “They are an important part of you.”

“Indeed. I didn’t realize how important until they all left.”

“Does this mean you want to move to Kentucky?”

He girded himself with resolve. “It does.”

“You would give up everything you’ve built here? Your successful business, your beautiful home?”

“Those are just things. Not the people I love. Some of life’s decisions go beyond logic and reason. Some must come from the heart.”

“So you’re certain this is what you want to do? Start completely over? You’ve been so successful here.”

Determined, he made his voice firm. “I can be successful anywhere. Success is not a place. It’s what you make of your life wherever you are.”

“Why haven’t you mentioned wanting to move to Kentucky before now?”

“My hesitation has been your father. I knew you wouldn’t want to leave him since you’re his only family. But before we discuss him, how do *you* feel about moving to a state that is still so young? Kentucky is in its infancy and far away from the luxuries and culture of Boston. If you have no desire to make such a drastic change, there’s no need to worry about your father. I’ll live wherever you want to. We can stay in Boston or Barrington, or both. I’ll move anywhere you want to go. What do you want to do?”

After a long pause, during which the tension within him swelled, she said, “While you and Sam were meeting with the mine operator to set up the gold mine, Catherine and I talked about many things, including Kentucky. She grew up in Boston too, attending all the fancy

galas and society events. She lived in that enormous mansion and enjoyed even more comforts and luxuries than I did. Yet, she longs to return to Kentucky, not stay in Boston. I asked her why and she helped me to understand something. She wanted to shape her own future. She wanted to make her own destiny. And Kentucky offered her a chance to do that.”

Edward studied her, trying to understand Dora’s meaning. “I can understand that for Catherine. She needed to get away from her father to live the life she wanted. But you and I have both been in control of our destinies. Why does the frontier appeal to you?” he asked.

“Because my orderly world, where I have done what was expected by society, is exceedingly boring. I want adventure and excitement. I want to experience new things. I want to find my own purpose in life.”

“But won’t you miss Boston?” He remembered his promise to Dora’s father that, if they married, she would be able to continue to cultivate her keen mind. If they moved to Kentucky, he would need to ensure that she found something to do that would challenge her.

“I’m sure I would miss some things. But as grand as Boston is, Catherine said the beauty of nature far surpasses anything man can create. And I agree with her. We just have to look around us to see evidence of that. But living among these mountains, with their vicious winters, is impossible. It’s even extraordinarily difficult in Barrington and Boston.”

“Agreed,” he said.

“Catherine says that Kentucky has a moderate climate and is also resplendent with the creator’s beauty. The state has mountains, vast forests, and sparkling lakes and rivers.”

“My brothers have all spoken about Kentucky’s beauty in their letters. They seem to think Kentucky really is the second paradise Daniel Boone described. And good land is plentiful. Even after giving Stephen and Jane a thousand acres, Sam and Catherine still have nine-thousand acres. Can you imagine owning that much land?”

She scurried a few steps past him and then stopped. She turned and looked intently at him. “I can and it makes me long to see Kentucky’s beauty for myself. It would be so exciting to ride my horse through virgin woods where no man or woman has ridden before. To walk through the grass of incomparable color, I often hear about. To



wade into the Cumberland River and watch the falls rushing over the rocks.”

“Sam says Cumberland Falls sounds like the pounding hooves of a thousand running horses.” He was astounded at how much her description made him long to see the beauty she described. And her words were some of the same thoughts that recently echoed in his own mind. Ever since the day he realized he could start anew. That day Dixon made his declaration about starting over at the dock.

It seemed they both wanted the same thing. The fact that her desires and dreams mirrored his so perfectly was a realization that left him reeling.

There was only one other matter to settle. “But what about your father? I know you won’t want to leave him. And neither do I.”

“After I realized that you had never said you wanted to live in Boston, I gave that some thought.”

“And?”

Her lips parted in a smile. “He can come with us!”

That option had never even occurred to him. “Do you think he’ll want to? He’s a little old to be uprooted, to start over.”

“Maybe he’s at just the right age. Maybe he’s ready for something new. To start another practice or even retire from practicing law. You are never too old to follow a new dream in search of a new life. Dreams are not limited by our age. Only by our imagination and initiative.”

*And our courage*, he thought. “But Dora, it’s our dream, not his.”

“We don’t know that yet. He has an indomitable spirit. I bet he’ll *want* to come along with us.”

“And if he doesn’t?”

She appeared thoughtful as she puzzled the possibility. After a few moments, she peered up at him, her expression serious. “Then I don’t think I can leave.”

## CHAPTER 39

It came as no surprise to Edward that Dora wouldn't leave her father. He couldn't blame her.

As they strolled back to the inn though, he tried to quell the disappointment churning within his chest. His dream of at last joining his brothers was quashed.

His father-in-law would never give up such a successful practice. Why should he? The man was well connected, respected, and a distinguished member of the bar. That took a lifetime to achieve. It would be unfair and unreasonable to even ask him to give it all up.

He couldn't ask. He wouldn't ask.

But Dora would. Because she wouldn't want Edward to be disappointed.

Unless he stopped her. He'd already grown fond of Mr. Tudor. And he respected the man. He was a formidable bundle of legal energy. The help he'd given Catherine and Sam was invaluable. How many others had the man helped through the years?

He needed to come up with a solution that would make them all happy. For the time being, he decided to focus on Dora and took her hand in his. She leaned her head against his arm and it sent a surge of warmth straight to his heart.

"I don't think father will want to go," she said, with a tinge of sadness.

"I agree. In fact, we shouldn't even ask him. It's unfair to put a question like that to him. He's worked so hard to achieve what he has. And we would be asking him to choose between his legal practice and you. It wouldn't be right to force that decision upon him."

She let out a long audible breath. "I suppose you're right."

Suddenly in a tumult, his mind spun trying to solve this dilemma.

Then it stopped just as quickly as he hit upon a realization.

“Dora.”

“Yes, Edward.”

“Before we entirely give up on the idea of going to Kentucky, I’m going to speak to your father first.”

“I thought you said it would be unfair to ask him to leave.”

“I did. But I have an idea.”



Their conversation earlier that day left Edward impatient to leave the inn and settle things. As they ate their candlelit dinner, he pulled his drifting thoughts together and said, “I’ve enjoyed every minute of our time here, however, Mr. Harper is returning in the morning. I think we should go with him.”

“We’ve only been here for half our honeymoon!”

“I know, and it’s been wonderful. But if we leave in the morning, we will save him another trip up here. And the day after tomorrow, we can go on to Boston so I can meet with your father. I’m anxious to speak with him.”

“What are you going to say to him? Why won’t you tell me?” she asked.

“Because I want to hear from him first.”

“I would like to get it settled, one way or another. It’s hard to think about the future when you don’t know what it holds.”

He let out a long sigh and then took a sip of his red wine. “We will share the future together, whatever and wherever it is.”

She reached for his hand. “Yes, it will be a new beginning for both of us. *Wherever* we are.”

He allowed his hidden thoughts to surface. He sincerely hoped his idea worked. Because he couldn’t stand the thought of Sam leaving for Kentucky again without him.



Two days later, Edward once again gave careful thought to the words he would use when he spoke to Dora's father. It was tough enough when he'd asked Mr. Tudor's permission to marry Dora after courting her for such a short time. But now he was about to ask something that his father-in-law would likely find far more difficult.

Unless he made his proposition carefully.

His carriage pulled to a stop in front of Tudor's office. He hoped his new father-in-law was there working. He wanted to get this over with.

"Hello, Mr. Wyllie," the clerk greeted him upon entering.

"Good morning, Sir. Is Mr. Tudor available to meet with me?"

"Let me check," the clerk said, standing.

The young man returned. "Indeed he is. Please go on in."

He entered the office and Tudor stood at once.

"Edward! Back so soon from your honeymoon? Is everything all right? Is Dora well?"

"Yes, Sir. She's well and incredibly happy. We had a wonderful time. The views from the inn were spectacular. Right now, Dora's visiting with Catherine and Sam." Earlier that morning, Edward had asked her not to say anything to his brother and sister-in-law about the possibility that they might move to Kentucky. He wanted Tudor's answer first.

"Please have a seat then and tell me why you've come."

"I have something we need to discuss. But first, on the way back from Whitefield we stopped at Crawford Notch and spoke to the geologist. He found only traces of gold on Mount Webster."

"That's a shame."

"Yes it is, but you should know that Sam intends to share the profits from the sale of gold from Wyllie Mountain with all of his brothers."

"That is generous of Sam, but it doesn't surprise me. Who will

operate the mine?" Tudor asked.

"We found an excellent operator with a spotless reputation. Sam and I both trust him. It will take at least a year to get it fully operational."

"I see."

"Sir, I believe you already know that I have four brothers who live in Kentucky—Sam, William, Stephen, and our adopted brother Bear. When they left for Kentucky, I wasn't ready to make that move for many reasons. Mostly, I was too worried about my children's safety. As you know, that worry proved pointless and..." He still found it difficult to say the words. "They died anyway, in New Hampshire. Now, with Dora by my side, I'm ready to join my brothers. I think Dora and I can accomplish something important in the West."

His father-in-law nodded. "You want to move to Kentucky and, of course, take your new bride with you."

"I do, Sir."

"What does Dora want?"

"She won't leave without you."

Tudor remained quiet, waiting for him to continue.

"I won't ask you to leave Boston. Why should you give up your practice and your comfortable life here? We will happily live here in Boston if that's what you would like. If so, rest assured, I will completely understand."

Tudor started to say something, but Edward held up his hand. "Wait. Before you say anything, hear me out. I have a proposition for you. As I think you know, my brother William was the sheriff of Barrington before he left and is now the sheriff of Boonesborough. He has studied the law for years and hopes to become a lawyer, like you, someday. But he wrote that there are no law schools in Kentucky. It occurred to me that you might consider starting Kentucky's first law school. We could build it in Lexington and you could be a professor and I could be its administrator. The state is growing and will need competent lawyers to help people—just as you helped Catherine and Sam."

Tudor's eyes grew wide. "Son, you have no idea how close you've come to some of the things that have been rumbling around inside this

old head. I've long been one of Harvard Law's patrons and have considered teaching there when I retire. But moving to Kentucky. That's a huge step and starting up a law school is an even bigger leap of faith."

Edward's enthusiasm took off, undeterred by Tudor's initial hesitation. "If you agree, we could include other forms of practical education too. Remember when you said that if we married Dora would need to be able to cultivate her fine mind? If she's willing, and she would find it rewarding, she could teach courses on writing or literature. She has a way with words that is sheer poetry. And her persuasive skills could increase awareness of the school's opening and its reputation."

Tudor nodded. "She would make a fine teacher."

"Our school could remain small until we secure other professors. Perhaps Judge Webb who is a friend of William's. William said Webb has an excellent legal mind but he's a no-nonsense frontier judge who enforces the law with a pistol and a sturdy rope."

That got a hearty cackle out of Tudor. "Tell me more of your ideas, Edward."

"Classes could be held in the late afternoons or weekends to allow students to keep daytime jobs. For example, William could travel to Lexington every other weekend. Lexington is only about twenty miles from Boonesborough where he lives."

Tudor seemed to be warming to the idea. "I could give the school my personal library. It includes the works of Blackstone, Sir Francis Bacon, Sir Henry Finch, and Sir Matthew Hale and several rare texts on early civil and common law. And I've written many papers on the topics myself."

"And I could finance the building," Edward said. "I could make it large enough to rent space to other lawyers and professionals."

"Are you certain there are enough willing students in Kentucky besides your brother William?"

"From what I've read, I believe so. This year's census showed the Kentucky population exceeds 220,000 and is expected to double in the next ten years. That's nearly 450,000 people by 1810! There will be a great need for lawyers and other professionals. We might even expand and build a medical school too someday. Prosperous families in

Kentucky and elsewhere are having to send their sons to Boston, Virginia, or abroad to get a legal or medical education.”

“True.”

“Sam tells me settlers are flocking there in great numbers and farms are springing up across the state. With Kentucky’s rich soil, settlers have raised successful corn, tobacco and wheat crops, fueling growth in the state’s economy, especially around Lexington.”

“Sounds like a prospering environment for education.”

“And if Dora and I choose to live in Lexington, we’ll be close to where William and Bear both live. Boonesborough is just a morning’s ride away. And we’d be fairly close to Stephen and Sam too. They live only a hundred miles due south of Lexington. I’d be able to see all my brothers and their families several times a year.”

“A law school should combine teaching the law with the practice of law,” Tudor told him, rubbing his chin.

At least Tudor was thinking philosophically about the idea. He might be in danger of putting butter on the bacon, but he had to say it. “You could build a law school of distinction and be recognized forever as its founder.”

Tudor perked up at that. He straightened himself with dignity and a look of satisfaction began to show in his twinkling eyes.

Edward’s excitement spiraled upward. “Earlier, I said I thought Dora and I could accomplish something important in the West. Well, you would be a big part of making that come true. Together, the three of us can make an impact on Kentucky’s future. We can give young people a chance for a better education.”

“Many things about this idea of yours seem right. But I want to talk to my daughter before any of us decide anything.”

“Of course, Sir. I just wanted to talk to you alone so that you would have the option of turning me down without being worried about disappointing Dora. Since she believes you will want to remain here in Boston, she is prepared to stay here.”

“Staying here may be the most sensible option. But that doesn’t make it the right decision. Sometimes in life, one must consider the unreasonable.”

“I agree. The most logical option is not always the wisest option.”

Tudor’s voice rose an octave as he declared, “To paraphrase Shakespeare, to leave or not to leave, that is the question!”

“Yes, Sir, that *is* the question. Dora is expecting us to have dinner with her. I asked her to invite Sam and Catherine as well. However, you should know, I haven’t told her about this idea of founding a law school yet. We discussed moving to Kentucky, but then we came to a standstill when we both realized it would be unfair to ask you to leave your law practice.”

“Edward, I think you may have missed your calling. You certainly know how to put together a persuasive case.”

“Perhaps I can be your first student, Sir,” Edward said, chuckling.

“Oh no! If we do this, you’ll stick to the business side of this venture. Come along, let’s not keep my darling girl waiting.”



## CHAPTER 40

Edward followed his new father-in-law into the Bell In Hand Tavern where he had agreed to meet Dora, Sam, and Catherine that evening. He found the three sitting at a table by the window. With the sun streaming in on her, Dora looked like an angel. Her dark hair glistened like shining glass and her eyes sparkled in her radiant and beautiful face.

Sam was bouncing Rory on one of his long legs and the babe babbled happily. Edward was relieved to see that Sam's head wound appeared to be healing well and his brother once again looked hale and hearty.

After Sam ordered them all an ale, Edward's heart thumped expectantly. He was anxious for Tudor to broach the question with Dora. Perhaps his father-in-law should take his daughter to another table so they could speak privately. "Do you wish to speak to Dora alone, Sir?"

"No, that won't be necessary," Tudor answered, looking at Dora with a mischievous grin. "We're all family now."

Edward turned to Catherine. "Speaking of family, how is your mother?"

Catherine smiled. "She's a changed woman. Now that she is no longer under my father's oppressive thumb, she's thriving. And Mr. Tudor here has helped represent her interests in settling my father's estate. Mother should be able to live comfortably for a very long time. She'll even be able to travel some. She's considering a trip to Brympton House in England to check on everything there for me."

"That's the estate Catherine owns," Sam explained.

"We own," Catherine corrected, with a resolute sideways glance at Sam.

"And has Mrs. Forbes accepted Rory?" Edward asked.

“Indeed. She even plays with him now! Although she still manages to appear quite proper doing so,” Catherine answered, chuckling.

“I think she will actually be sorry to see us leave for Kentucky,” Sam said.

The thought of Sam and Catherine returning to their home brought Edward back to the topic weighing heavily on his mind. He could hardly wait to settle this. He glanced at Sam and swallowed the lump in his throat, realizing how much going to Kentucky and being with his brothers again meant to him.

The mention of Sam and Catherine leaving for Kentucky, also made Tudor turn to Dora. “My new son-in-law tells me you are considering relocating to Kentucky.”

“What!” Sam and Catherine both cried out at once.

Startled, Rory looked up at first his father and then his mother. Sam patted the boy’s head reassuringly.

Edward held up a hand. “Nothing’s decided yet. We have much to consider. That’s why Mr. Tudor wants to speak with Dora.”

“Yes, father, we would consider a move,” Dora said, “but only if you feel you can do so as well. I refuse to leave you behind. We can stay in Boston. I would be perfectly happy remaining here.”

Now that his heart was set on going to Kentucky, Edward wondered if he could ever be completely happy here.

He eyed Sam.

Catherine stared at Dora.

Then all four peered at Mr. Tudor who studied his daughter’s face for a long moment. “Earlier, Edward proposed the idea of my moving to Kentucky. I thought it preposterous. Laughable even.”

Crestfallen himself, Edward saw disappointment also register on Dora’s face. Her smile quickly faded.

Tudor continued, “Then your husband made an extraordinarily interesting proposition to me.”

“What was that?” Dora asked, looking over at Edward.

“You don’t know?” Catherine questioned.

“No, I have no idea what father’s talking about,” Dora answered. “What proposition?”

“I can’t say until your father agrees or disagrees,” Edward told her.

“This is getting awfully confusing,” Catherine said.

“What *are* you talking about, Edward?” Sam probed.

Edward could see both hope and impatience in Sam’s eyes.

“Are you coming to Kentucky or not?” Sam pressed.

“Hold on, all of you. Let me try to explain,” Tudor said in a fatherly tone. “Dora won’t move unless I do. As you know, I have a well-established lucrative law practice and an exceedingly comfortable home. To entice me to leave Boston, Edward has come up with the idea of founding a law school together in Lexington.”

“That’s a marvelous idea!” Dora declared with a clap of her hands. She beamed admiringly at Edward. “Where’s Lexington?”

“Lexington is in central Kentucky and is the largest and most prosperous town west of the Allegheny Mountains,” Sam told her. “I’ve been to a horse race there. It’s a fine city.”

Edward added, “I’ve read that Lexington’s population is close to eighteen-hundred and it contains about five hundred dwellings many of them elegant and three stories high. And the county has close to fifteen-thousand people. With the anticipated growth in population there, in addition to the law school, I could also open another store.”

Sam turned to Tudor. “What do you think of the idea, Mr. Tudor? Surely leaving your home and everything you’ve worked so hard for would be extremely difficult for you.”

Tudor rubbed his chin. “What do I think?”

Everyone stared, motionless, waiting for his father-in-law’s answer.

“I think it’s the best damn idea anyone has ever proposed to me!”

Edward smiled broadly at Dora. After a moment, everyone

started talking at once. Excitement grew plentifully as plans and ideas poured out of the two couples with Tudor just listening to it all.

Finally, Tudor held up his hands. "Before we decide everything from the size of the school to the ideal number of students per class, I want to explain my one caveat."

Everyone grew quiet again.

"Caveat?" Catherine asked.

"My one condition—a proviso in legal terms."

Dora gave Edward a worried glance.

"I want to live by myself. I've been a bachelor far too long to join a newlywed couple. Especially a couple as hopelessly in love as these two!"

Everyone laughed and Dora gave her father a huge hug.

"And I have one condition too," Edward said, turning to Sam. "You will agree to teach me as much as you can about surviving in the wilderness, including lessons on shooting a long rifle. I realize the threat of Indian attacks ended with the Battle of Fallen Timbers, but there are plenty of other perils in a state as young as Kentucky."

"Agreed. I'll gladly teach you what I've learned over the years. We can start your lessons on the journey to Kentucky."

"Thank you," Edward said, with a pat to Sam's back.

"Some of the best gunsmiths are here in Boston. We'll buy a long rifle for you and Dora today. She should have one too," Sam said, smiling at her.

Dora's face looked startled at the suggestion. She glanced at Catherine.

"I have one," Catherine said. "And believe it or not, I'm a pretty good shot with it."

"She is," Sam confirmed. "Forget all the rules you've grown up with here in Boston. On the frontier, women are just as courageous and just as fierce as the men they fight beside."

"You may never need to use a long rifle," Catherine said, "but

you never know where a threat may come from or when. Even if you're just traveling between Lexington and our horse farm, you may have need of the weapon."

Sam's face grew serious. "As far as surviving in the wilderness, the first rule is to be ever vigilant. And the second rule is to never give up."

Tudor raised his mug. "Ho for Kentucky! May we succeed in bringing the reason of law to the wilds of the frontier!"

They all raised their cups and joyously joined his salute.



To allow them all to leave together, Sam and Catherine agreed to remain in Boston for a couple of weeks. They sent a letter to Bear and Little John explaining their delay, but added that they would be bringing a great surprise back with them. Edward's arrival in Kentucky would be a wonderful surprise for his brothers and their families.

Catherine was delighted to have the extra time to spend with her mother. The two planned to shop for new gowns for Catherine and gifts for everyone in the family in Kentucky.

During the two weeks, her father turned over his clients to two young lawyers he admired and enjoyed farewell dinners with his closest friends. He also arranged to sell his home to a couple that had previously offered to buy it. And he gave his servants a handsome severance and wrote them all letters of recommendation. The couple buying the house thought they could employ most of them.

Dora insisted on writing reference letters for her servants herself, but turned them and her home over to her former father-in-law, Mr. Williams since he was the home's owner. The hardest part was saying goodbye to Marie. The maid had been with her ever since Dora married her first husband. But the separation grew easier when Marie revealed that she and a young man had become close and she anticipated being married soon.

Since Mr. Williams had bought most of the home's contents, she took only her clothing, a few of her favorite books, and a small number of sentimental items. Everything was packed in trunks and stored at the Forbes mansion until the trunks would either be loaded

or shipped in the morning.

Edward had jokingly suggested that she turn Mount Webster over to her uncles that had pestered her so. She actually considered it for a moment thinking it would serve them right if she also gave them a fake map to the hidden gold treasure. They got a good laugh out of it, but in the end, she decided against doing so.

She considered selling Mount Webster for iron ore mining, but then decided she wanted to keep the mountain unspoiled for future generations to enjoy. Perhaps she would donate the land to be used as a park someday.

While Dora was packing her things and settling matters in Boston, Edward went up to Barrington for a week. When he got back, he told her he had visited with the parents of his deceased wife. He told them that he would always love Anne, but that he was now remarried and moving to Kentucky.

He also said he personally visited the other wealthy merchants in the area to find positions for his servants. He especially wanted to see Mrs. Hollingsworth securely situated and he succeeded in finding her employment with a nearby growing family. He decided to sell his home, furnishings and all, and employed his lawyer in Barrington to arrange for the sale.

Deciding what to do with his three stores proved more difficult for Edward. In the end, he decided to sell each store to the store manager and he arranged credit terms for each of them in exchange for a share of the stores' profits for the next ten years. It would give each of his managers a chance to become successful entrepreneurs and provide Edward with a steady stream of income while he got his ventures in Kentucky underway. The managers would have the local bank send regular deposits to the Bank of Kentucky. Based in Lexington, the bank was recently granted banking powers by the Kentucky legislature.

By far the most difficult task for Edward had been visiting his family at Nottingham Cemetery to say his goodbyes. This time though, he was able to finally face the headstones of his three children. Dora's heart broke for him when he told her that their names and the dates of their deaths brought tears to his eyes. But he was also able to rejoice that they were in the glorious presence of God.

The two weeks flew by in a blur, but at last, they were all set to leave the next morning. Sam had arranged for the same coachman

that brought them to Boston to also drive them all the way back to Redstone, Pennsylvania. From there, they would take a keelboat down the Ohio to Louisville. And from there they would travel by wagon to Boonesborough to visit William and Bear and their families before going on to Lexington. And Sam promised to bring Stephen's family for a visit as soon as Edward and Dora were settled in.

Dora watched Edward toss a couple of logs onto the fire and pull the drape nearly closed, leaving a sliver of moonlight that fell on their bed at the Forbes mansion.

It had been a long and exhausting day as they finalized plans for their move with her father, but her heart raced with excitement. Their journey would be the beginning of a whole new world—possibilities they couldn't even fathom yet.

Edward blew out the candles. "You know, it will be an awfully long time until we have any privacy," he told her.

"Is there something you want to discuss in private?"

"No."

"Is there something you want to show me in private?"

"Well...yes."

"Is there something you want to do in private?"

"Most definitely."

She let her eyes gaze at him coyly. "What's that?"

"You know exactly what I want to do."

"I do?" she asked.

"Indeed." He wasted no further time and began to undress her.

As usual, she did not assist him because she enjoyed the feel of his hands taking off her clothing.

When he finished removing every stitch, she stood there before him. His smoldering eyes roamed over her. "Get in bed before you get chilled." His voice was deeper than normal. "I'll make sure the door is locked."

She slid beneath the cool sheets and drew the warm luxurious

bed covers over her. It would be a long time before she would know such luxury again. The trip would be arduous, dirty, and likely dangerous.

But she couldn't wait.

For now, she abandoned her excited thoughts about their upcoming journey. She admired her husband as he removed his own clothing and she made no attempt to hide the fact that she was watching him.

He stood there undressing, his body lit by the light from the hearth fire, a perfect specimen of the male species. Tall, strong, broad shouldered, and well-muscled.

She couldn't even look at his face without wanting to smile. "You're so magnificent," she told him.

"You're the real beauty," he said, his eyes touching her all the way to her soul. "The beauty of love."

"And you, my darling Edward, make everything about love beautiful."

When he lowered himself onto the bed, her insides fluttered as she anticipated his first touch.

For a moment, Dora wondered if it would always be this exciting. But it didn't have to be. Whatever the years did to them, it would never take away their love. She was absolutely certain that someday they would share what Edward had called 'old' love.

Theirs was not only a love at first sight, it would be a love at last sight.

The most beautiful and forever kind of love.



## EPILOGUE

A thrill of anticipation touched Edward's spine. They were going to Kentucky! At last he felt the excitement that he'd only witnessed when his brothers left for Kentucky three years ago.

Finally, beyond any doubt, he was ready to face the unknown. Whatever dangers lay ahead, he would face them with courage.

As dawn approached, the servants helped load their trunks, which filled the entire top and back of the coach. Some of their things were being shipped to Lexington, but Mr. Tudor brought along his most treasured law books.

The new thoroughbred mare and Archy were tied securely to the back since Catherine and Dora would ride in the carriage with Dora's father and Rory. The babe's things were inside the coach and they'd fashioned a miniature bed for him out of a crate they'd lined with cushions.

Sam, feeling completely recovered, would ride his new stallion that he'd named Jupiter at Dora's suggestion. And Edward would ride Longshanks. Both would ride ahead of the carriage and be able to spot any trouble spots in the road. And if Edward knew his brother, he was certain Sam would be watching for any signs of danger too.

"Time to climb aboard," the coachman called down to them. "We'd best get an early start before the streets of Boston get busy."

Catherine embraced her mother who actually wiped a tear from one eye and hugged her back. Then Mrs. Forbes touched Rory's cheek and smiled affectionately. "Take good care of my grandson. And I shall expect regular letters from you."

Catherine promised to write often and then waved goodbye to Lucius and the other servants before she climbed up into the coach. Earlier, she offered to give Lucius his freedom and bring him with them to Kentucky where he could find his own land. But the loyal servant declined saying Mrs. Forbes would need his help now more

than ever.

Edward stuck his head inside the carriage. Dora's father sat next to her, an arm looped affectionately around his daughter's elbow. "Mr. Tudor," Edward asked, "are you excited?"

Tudor smiled broadly. "Call me Douglas. I think it's time for all of you to start calling me by my Christian name. And yes Edward, I'm eager to start my second life. I say why limit yourself to just one life when there's so much living to do!"

"I couldn't agree more," Edward said and looked at his wife. "Dora, Kentucky awaits!"

*We hope you enjoyed reading*

***American Wilderness Series Romances Book Six***

**THE BEAUTY OF LOVE**

*Dear Reader,*

*Thank you for selecting my novel to read. If you enjoyed reading this book, I would be honored if you would share your thoughts with your friends. Regardless of whether you are reading print or electronic versions, I'd be extremely grateful if you posted a short review on **The Beauty of Love** page on [Amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com). Reviews are so helpful to both authors and readers. It helps the works of authors to stay visible on Amazon and it helps readers find books they will enjoy.*

*If you would like to contact me directly, please send me a note through the 'Contact' tab on my website [www.dorothywiley.com](https://www.dorothywiley.com). Under that same tab you can also sign up for my **American Wilderness Series Newsletter** <https://www.dorothywiley.com/contact.html>.*

*If you are interested in reading my other novels, they are listed on the following page.*

*You can also follow me on Amazon at [www.amazon.com/author/dorothywiley](https://www.amazon.com/author/dorothywiley).*

*And, please follow me on Book Bub at <https://www.bookbub.com/search?search=Dorothy+Wiley> to receive special offers for free or discounted books as well as notifications of my new releases.*

*Thanks for your support!*

*All the best,*

***Dorothy***

## OTHER TITLES BY DOROTHY WILEY

**Book One** — *The story of Stephen and Jane*

WILDERNESS TRAIL OF LOVE

<http://www.amazon.com/dp/1497393582>



**Book Two** — *The story of Sam and Catherine*

NEW FRONTIER OF LOVE

<http://www.amazon.com/dp/1497438640>



**Book Three** — *The story of William and Kelly*

WHISPERING HILLS OF LOVE

<http://www.amazon.com/Whispering-Hills/dp/1497482917>



**Book Four** — *The story of Bear and Artis*

FRONTIER HIGHLANDER VOW OF LOVE

<http://www.amazon.com/Frontier-Highlander/dp/1511522224>



**Book Five** — *A story of Sam and Catherine and the entire family*

FRONTIER GIFT OF LOVE



## ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Amazon best-selling novelist Dorothy Wiley is the author of six books, including her highly acclaimed debut novel *Wilderness Trail of Love*, the first in her American Wilderness Series Romances. Called a “deft new writer of intelligent romantic fiction,” Wiley enjoys writing action-packed romantic adventures that celebrate the rich historical heritage of the frontier and the courageous settlers who shaped America.

Like Wiley’s compelling heroes, who from the onset make it clear they will not fail despite the adversities they face, this author is likewise destined for success. In 2014 and 2015, her novels won six awards, notably a Readers’ Favorite Gold Medal; Amazon Breakthrough Novel Award Quarter-finalist; USA Best Book Awards Finalist; and a Historical Novel Society Editor’s Choice. Her books continue to earn five-star ratings from readers and high praise from reviewers.

The daughter of a talented artist, Wiley inherited her father’s creativity. Raised in southern California, she attended college at The University of Texas in Austin, Texas. She graduated with honors, receiving a bachelor of journalism, and grew to dearly love both Texas and a 7th generation Texan. Her husband’s courageous ancestors, very early pioneers of Kentucky, Louisiana, and Texas, provided the inspiration for her novels.

After a distinguished career in corporate marketing and public relations, she is living her dream—writing historical romances. On their ranch in central Texas, Wiley is currently at work on a new book.

## CONNECT WITH THE AUTHOR

Follow Dorothy Wiley on Amazon at:

[www.amazon.com/author/dorothywiley](http://www.amazon.com/author/dorothywiley)



To see beautiful trailers for each of her books, enter Dorothy Wiley in YouTube's search box or go to:

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCE7DLH6XkByxWPJewaud45Q>



Dorothy Wiley's author website:

[www.dorothywiley.com](http://www.dorothywiley.com)



Facebook:

<https://www.facebook.com/authordorothywiley>



Twitter:

<https://twitter.com/WileyDorothy>



## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

A huge thank you to all my loyal readers. I am so grateful for each and every one of you!

I also appreciate all the support of my Facebook friends and readers who like and share my posts. And to those super fans—you know who you are—who are always there on Facebook encouraging me, you are my book angels!

I especially want to thank those of you who take the time to write such kind reviews on Amazon. They truly inspire me!

And your reviews help other readers find and enjoy my books. Your ratings and reviews, no matter whether they are just a few words or several paragraphs, are enormously appreciated.

Please send me a note, through the Contact tab on my website [www.dorothymwiley.com](http://www.dorothymwiley.com) with a link to your review so that I can personally write you a note of thanks.

I would also like to thank my husband, the hero of my life, for always having faith in me. My husband's brave ancestors inspired these novels.

And my thanks to my dear talented sister, who shares a part of me (just as Sam and Edward did in this book) for her help in polishing and formatting this manuscript.

And thank you Mom for being my biggest fan. I know you would tell the world about my books if you could. As a mother-in-law who is more like a mother, you have blessed my life. Happy 85<sup>th</sup> this year!

And my thanks to my fellow author and friend Deborah Gafford, a wonderful writer, for her suggestions and support. Please check out her books at [www.amazon.com/author/deborahgafford](http://www.amazon.com/author/deborahgafford).

I also received many helpful suggestions from JoAnne Weiss who reviews for <http://romancing-the-book.com/>.

Also, my thanks to designer Erin Dameron-Hill, the artist who created the stunning covers for all six of my novels.

Please keep your reviews and notes coming. I love hearing from my readers!

***Dorothy***

## INTERESTING FACTS BEHIND THIS STORY

The poem at the beginning, in the book's front matter, was written by George Gordon, Lord Byron, who was considered to be the most flamboyant and notorious of the major Romantics and the most fashionable poet of the day. For more information on this poet visit:

<http://www.poetryfoundation.org/bio/lord-byron>

The origin of the Bell In Hand Tavern is based on history. Boston's retired town crier, Jimmy Wilson, did open the establishment and happily it still exists to this day. It claims to be America's oldest tavern with its first pour in 1795. Learn more at:

<http://bellinhand.com/>

The Parker House (now the Omni Parker House), where Edward and Dora spent their wedding night, was actually built in 1854. For more information and to view a brochure on the history of this Boston landmark, visit:

<http://www.omnihotels.com/-/media/images/hotels/bospar/hotel/pdfs/parker%20house%20history.pdf?la=en>

Although Dora and Edward decided to go elsewhere for their honeymoon, historically and interestingly, it was the romantic French who established Niagara Falls as the ideal honeymoon destination in the early 1800s. Napoleon's brother, Jerome Bonaparte, and his bride travelled by coach from New Orleans to spend his honeymoon in Niagara Falls. See more at:

[http://www.infoniagara.com/history/honeymoon\\_city.aspx#sthash.FdLhuWal.dpuf](http://www.infoniagara.com/history/honeymoon_city.aspx#sthash.FdLhuWal.dpuf)

And Vice President Aaron Burr's daughter, Theodosia and her new husband Joseph, also honeymooned there in 1802.

The place I chose as the setting for their honeymoon—Mountain View Inn—was actually built later, in 1865, by the real Mr. and Mrs. Dodge. And their first guests, whose coach broke down, inspired the carriage accident Edward and Dora experienced. For more information on the Mountain View Grand Resort's history visit:

As far as discovering gold in New Hampshire Mountains, that actually did happen, but on a smaller scale. By 1864, there were several mines with operations that produced gold that was shipped to the Philadelphia Mint before economic circumstances closed the mines.

With the growth of the nation, came the need for growth in educational institutions, including law schools. According to the William & Mary Law School website, "Thomas Jefferson saw the need for legal reorganization in the colonies and sought to remedy the situation in Virginia at his alma mater, William and Mary. In 1779, at Jefferson's urging, the College's Board of Visitors resolved to create a professorship of Law and Police. On December 28, 1779, the Board named Jefferson's mentor, George Wythe, to that position." Founded in 1817, Harvard Law School is the oldest continually operating law school in the country. The University of Louisville's Brandeis School of Law, founded in 1846, is, according to their website, Kentucky's oldest law school and America's fifth oldest law school in continuous operation. So the fictional time frame for the establishment of a school of law in Kentucky around 1800 could be reasonable.

The heroine in this book, Dora, was a fan of the writer Hannah Adams, a distant cousin to President John Adams, who is also mentioned in the story. Hannah Adams (1755 – 1831) was an author of several books on comparative religion and early U.S. history. She was the first woman in the United States who worked professionally as a writer.

Truth can definitely inspire fiction. And even romance!